**FLOOD**
TEMPORAL COMMONS

MIT ARCHITECTURE
ARCH 4.154
SPRING 2026
TR 1:00 – 5:00
RM ?-???
CREDITS: 0-10-11 G

# Syllabus


INSTRUCTORS

**Brandon Clifford** – bcliffor@mit.edu
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**Reishan McIntosh** – reishan@mit.edu


SPECIAL GUESTS

**John Ochsendorf** – (*building scientist*)
**Kiel Moe** – (*architect & forestry ecologist*)
**Kim Nørgaard Helmersen** – (*sociologist*)
**Lily L. Tsai** – (*political scientist*)

## OVERVIEW

The *Temporal Commons* is a multi-year research project that aims to bridge two millennia—one behind us & one to come—by integrating speculative futures with historical foundations. In doing so, it challenges the immediacy that dominates architectural discourse and the instinctive temporal narrowing of modernism's legacy of presentism, proposing instead a pedagogy and practice grounded in the longue durée: an expanded historical horizon attentive to cycles of continuity, transformation, and stewardship.

This year's studio, **FLOOD**, will situate architectural thinking within the fragile ecologies of mountain and riverine systems—landscapes increasingly vulnerable to flash flooding. Here, water is both a destructive force and a generative agent, revealing how architectural, legal, and ecological structures are intertwined. The studio will examine how forest depletion, timber extraction, and shortened building lifespans accelerate hydrological instability—how the rhythms of design and demolition reverberate through riparian systems. Through design speculation, students will explore how altering and extending the lifespan and regulatory contexts of materials and structures might stabilize these environments, fostering architectures of stewardship rather than extraction.

## STRUCTURE

Operating between research & design, the studio will adopt a dual structure:

- As a **workshop**, students will pursue historical and theoretical investigations into topics such as riparian law, forest governance, cultural practices of riverine settlements, timber economies, and hydraulic science. These inquiries will establish a shared intellectual foundation and critical vocabulary.

- As a **studio**, students will translate this research into speculative architectural proposals—projects that test new modes of temporality, adaptation, and ecological reciprocity. Design will serve as both method and argument, transforming research into spatial, material, and environmental propositions.

## TRAVEL

The studio will travel to Vermont to engage mountain and riparian landscapes near Goddard College in Plainfield. Through site visits to river systems, historic infrastructure, and first- and second-growth forests, students will encounter overlapping ecological and architectural timescales shaped by extraction, flooding, and stewardship. The trip will ground speculative work in direct observation of terrain, material, and duration.

**Evaluation Criteria and Grading**

The following criteria will be used for the evaluation of your work, both in terms of helping your progress and in final grading:

- **Thesis**: How clearly are you articulating your conceptual intentions?
- **Translation of Thesis**: How well are you using your thesis to develop an architectural response to given problems?
- **Completion**: Are the objectives of the assignment completed?
- **Representation Appropriateness**: How well matched is your choice of representational means to your intentions?
- **Representation Quality**: To what degree do your representations convey what they ought to?
- **Oral Presentation Skills**: How clearly are you presenting your ideas orally, whether at your desk, or to a more formal jury?
- **Participation in Discussions**: How actively and how constructively are you involved in class discussions?
- **Response to Criticism**: How effectively do you take advantage of criticism from instructors, your classmates and outside jurors?
- **Auto-Critical Skills**: To what extent are you able to critique your own work regularly and effectively?

**A**: *Excellent* – Project surpasses expectations in terms of inventiveness, appropriateness, verbal and visual ability, conceptual rigor, craft, and personal development. Student pursues concepts and techniques above and beyond that discussed in class.
**B**: *Above Average* – Project is thorough, well researched, diligently pursued, and successfully completed. Student pursues ideas and suggestions presented in class and puts in effort to resolve required projects. Project is complete on all levels and demonstrates potential for excellence.
**C**: *Average* – Project meets the minimum requirements. Suggestions made in class are not pursued with dedication or rigor. Project is incomplete in one or more areas.
**D**: *Poor* – Project is incomplete. Basic skills including graphic skills, model-making skills verbal clarity or logic of presentation is not level-appropriate. Student does not demonstrate the required design skill and knowledge base.
**F**: *Failure* – Project is unresolved. Minimum objectives are not met. Performance is not acceptable. This grade will be assigned when you have more than two unexcused absences.

**Policies**

Attendance at all class meetings is mandatory. If any meeting (lecture or workshop session) is to be missed, please notify the instructor prior to the scheduled class. Please remember to silence cell phones and be courteous when using laptops in class. This course is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with the faculty member/department administrator early in the semester so that accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion.

<u>*Undergraduates*</u>: If anything is getting in the way of your academics, please consult with S3 (s3-support@mit.edu). The walk-in queue is open from 10-12 and 2-4 on weekdays. Appointments can be virtual or in-person, depending on your comfort and convenience.

<u>*Graduates*</u>: A variety of issues may impact your academic career including faculty/student relationships, funding, and interpersonal concerns. In the office of Graduate Education (OGE), GradSupport provides consultation, coaching, and advocacy to graduate students on matters relating to academic and life changes.

If you are dealing with an issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an example, you may contact GradSupport by email at gradsupport@mit.edu or via phone at (617) 253-4860.

The MIT online course management system (Canvas) will be used exclusively in the course. Lecture handouts and exercise descriptions will be available there shortly after class is held. Students will also be submitting exercises and materials through this system and must do so by the assigned due date.

**Schedule**

Week 01
- 2/3 Preview Event
- 2/5 Introduction – Assign Part I

Week 02
- 2/10 Workshop
- 2/12 Studio

Week 03
- 2/17 HOLIDAY – President's Day
- 2/19 Studio

Week 04
- 2/24 Workshop
- 2/26 Studio

Week 05
- 3/3 Workshop
- 3/5 **Travel Retreat & PUBLISH** *(Part I)*

Week 06
- 3/10 Workshop – Assign Part II
- 3/12 Studio

Week 07
- 3/17 Workshop
- 3/19 Studio

Week 08
- 3/24 Spring Break
- 3/26 Spring Break

Week 09
- 3/31 Workshop
- 4/2 Studio

Week 10
- 4/7 Workshop
- 4/9 **MID-REVIEW**

Week 11
- 4/14 Workshop
- 4/16 Studio

Week 12
- 4/21 Workshop
- 4/23 Studio

Week 13
- 4/28 Workshop
- 4/30 Studio

Week 14
- 5/5 Workshop
- 5/7 Studio

Week 15
- 5/12 Workshop

- 5/8 **FINAL REVIEW** – 1:00PM-5:00PM – *Long Lounge*