

MIT Department of Architecture
Core I Studio
Fall 2026

Instructors

Mara Jovanovic
Carrie Norman ([Office Hours](#))
William O'Brien Jr., Coordinator ([Office Hours](#))

Teaching Assistants

Orr Kalati
Harrison White

Meeting Times

Tuesday, 1:00–5:00
Thursday, 1:00–3:00*
Friday, 1:00–5:00

*We will occasionally meet on Thursdays from 1:00–5:00 during weeks when we are unable to meet during the Tuesday/Friday time slots, or when a review necessitates falling on a Thursday.

Core I Studio Aims & Responsibilities

1. *Welcome* our new M.Arch cohort to the Department, the School, the Institute, the discipline, and the profession.
2. *Orient* our students toward faculty, staff, students, and resources that can help them be successful.
3. *Frame* a cohesive series of design exercises that enable students to rehearse design processes iteratively.
4. *Encourage* an interpretive understanding of the design brief and context as an early stage in the formulation of an “agenda.”
5. *Nurture* incoming students’ backgrounds, while questioning preconceptions about the constitution of architecture.
6. *Foster* a culture of drawing and making as an inextricable method of design inquiry.
7. *Introduce* and experiment with different modes of authorship.
8. *Instill* healthy and respectful work habits for the duration of the M.Arch and beyond.
9. *Draw-out* and cultivate a unique identity within the M.Arch cohort.
10. *Inspire* the pursuit of different forms of agency in architecture.

Studio Overview

The Core I Studio establishes foundations for architectural design through four exercises that build in scope to engage issues of form, space, organization, structure, circulation, use, tectonics, and agency. Design is introduced as an iterative form of research through which students develop conceptual ideas and translate them into representational, material, and physical manifestations. Each exercise introduces an increasingly complex set of relationships among site, program, and building systems, while developing analytical, conceptual, representational, and technical skills.

The exercises in Core I aim to elicit new forms of architectural coherence—architectures that are forward-looking yet able to communicate with disciplinary histories, articulate their own positions, and offer means by which they may be critically assessed. Core I should not be viewed simply as an extension of prior educational experience, but as an opportunity to reset within a new context, and to establish new relationships within the department, program, and cohort.

This studio is organized around four riddles. Each riddle is posed not to be solved definitively, but to be worked through, returned to, and understood more deeply through making.

The riddle is important to how we will work together. A riddle establishes a shared question without predetermining the terms of its answer. It gives everyone a point of entry, regardless of prior experience, while leaving considerable room for interpretation, invention, and surprise. The same riddle can produce radically different responses, each revealing something about how its author observes, imagines, and makes sense of the problem at hand. In this way, the riddle asks students not simply to demonstrate what they already know, but to discover a way of working that is distinctly their own.

The four riddles for Fall 2026 are:

Design a figure and another and an other.

Design a mask that conceals and reveals.

Design a hall for one, for some, and for all.

Design a building that is a part and stands apart.

There is also something particularly MIT about approaching serious questions through play. Across the Institute, play has long existed alongside rigor: things are built, tested, raced, hacked, competed, dismantled, and built again. The seriousness of the inquiry does not preclude experimentation, humor, curiosity, or even absurdity; often these are precisely the conditions through which unexpected discoveries become possible. We approach architectural design in a similar spirit. This is not play as an escape from rigor, nor an infantilization of the design process.

It is serious play: a willingness to enter fully into a problem, to test its limits, and to recognize that any design opportunity—however abstract, modest, strange, or seemingly simple—can become consequential when pursued with curiosity and commitment.

The riddles progress deliberately—from figure to object, to room, to building—each introducing new scales, constraints, and forms of responsibility. What connects them is a shared insistence that architecture is not a matter of immediate answers, but of careful observation, iteration, and judgment. Each exercise asks students to move between observation and imagination, drawing and making, abstraction and occupation, while gradually expanding the field within which architectural relationships are considered.

The progression is also organized around an expanding relationship to the human body. The first riddle begins without a body, with the abstract figure and the relationships through which form can be understood and transformed. The second encounters the body directly: first through a mask worn by one body, and then through its transformation into a larger assembly occupied by several. The third moves outward to the room and the collective body it gathers. The fourth expands to the building, where many collective bodies, programs, institutions, and publics are brought into relation with one another and with the larger context of the city. With each riddle, architecture acquires another layer(s) of complexity and responsibility. An abstract relationship becomes material; an object becomes inhabited; individual occupation becomes collective experience; and a spatial proposition becomes part of an institutional and civic world.

Throughout, the aim is not to arrive at a singular answer, but to develop the capacity to recognize possibilities, construct relationships, make judgments, and transform even the simplest prompt into an architectural proposition.

Pedagogical Objectives

Our primary pedagogical objectives for Core I are:

1. The development of an ability to conceptualize abstractly and represent architecturally. This includes modes of drawing and modeling that are analytical (about discovery), and correlated modes of drawing and modeling that are projective (about declaration).
2. The development of two- and three-dimensional dexterity, and an ability to conceive of form, space, and matter. Here, “conceive” is understood as both an act of comprehension and an act of creation.
3. The development of an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between observation and imagination in architectural design.

Completion Requirements

At the end of the course, students should be able to translate an idea into an architectural proposition and understand the intentions and consequences behind design decisions. Students should also be able to engage in increasingly complex design problems through iterative studies and move fluidly between different modes and scales of design. Conventions of architectural representation and communication through drawing and modeling should be engaged with clarity and intentionality. Completion of each exercise, investment in process, clarity in representation, and overall progress throughout the semester will be fundamental factors in the final evaluation. The Core I Studio is Pass/Fail.

Mentorship Talks

Mentorship talks provide opportunities for students to encounter the work and outlooks of faculty members, while also understanding something of the lives and trajectories that have made that work possible. These talks are intentionally different from conventional academic lectures. Faculty and members of the teaching team will share projects, ideas, and practices, but they are also invited to discuss what often remains outside the frame: how interests developed over time, how consequential choices were made, how opportunities emerged or disappeared, how collaborations and relationships shaped the work, and how professional ambitions have been negotiated alongside the other demands and pleasures of a life. There is rarely a singular or linear path toward a meaningful life in architecture. Practices change, interests migrate, careers accelerate and stall, and the relationship between one's work and one's values is continually being renegotiated. By making some of this normally invisible territory visible, the talks are intended to expand students' sense of what an architectural life might look like. They are not prescriptions for paths to follow, but candid accounts that students might compare with their own emerging interests and ambitions. Over time, these encounters may also help students recognize affinities with particular faculty members and lay the groundwork for eventual mentor/mentee relationships.

Note on Generative AI

Generative AI should be understood as a tool, and like any tool used in architectural design, it carries particular possibilities and particular constraints. A ruler and compass make certain geometries easy to construct and others difficult; a pencil encourages particular kinds of marks and forms of thinking; Rhino allows us to describe, manipulate, and visualize geometry in ways that inevitably influence what we design. None of these tools is neutral. Each has affordances, biases, limits, and conventions, and part of becoming an architect is developing an awareness of how the tools we use shape the things we are able to imagine. Generative AI is no different. Its

novelty and apparent intelligence can sometimes obscure the fact that it is another instrument within a much larger repertoire. We encourage students to become curious about what it can do well, attentive to what it cannot do, and conscious of the ways its use might expand—or constrain—their own thinking.

Generative AI can be an extraordinarily productive tool for architectural thinking—capable of provoking unexpected associations, generating alternatives, and opening avenues of inquiry that might otherwise remain unexplored. At the same time, we want to preserve the value of the half-formed thought. An idea that has not yet acquired a definite form possesses a particular kind of potential: it might still become many things. There is value in spending time with that uncertainty—in drawing, making, talking, wondering, and allowing an idea to develop before knowing exactly what it is. Generative AI can sometimes short-circuit this productive ambiguity by giving an idea a convincing instantiation before it has had sufficient time to evolve. Once something has been seen, it can become surprisingly difficult to unsee; one possible manifestation can inadvertently narrow a field of possibilities that had previously been much larger. We therefore encourage students to develop judgment not only about how to use AI, but when. At times it may be wonderfully generative; at others, deliberately withholding its use may allow an uncertain thought to remain open long enough to lead somewhere stranger, less predictable, and ultimately more your own.

Key Dates

Exercise 1 Final Review: Tuesday, 9/15

Exercise 2 Final Review Part A: Tuesday, 9/29

Exercise 2 Final Review Part B: Friday, 10/16

Exercise 3 Final Review: Friday, 10/30

Exercise 4 Mid Review: Thursday, 11/19

Exercise 4 Final Review: Tuesday, 12/8

Studio Culture

Work in the studio will build sequentially, making commitment to incremental development essential. Charrettes before reviews alone will not suffice. The pace of the studio requires consistent attendance and adherence to deadlines, while working together in studio allows students to participate in the dialogue and collective learning fundamental to architectural education. Attendance in studio and for the duration of all formal reviews is required. More than two unexcused absences may result in a failing grade. As part of the Department's renewed commitment to studio culture, each MARCH student is provided a workstation with the software

used throughout the program. This initiative is intended both to provide equitable access to resources and to encourage students to work together in studio.

In an effort to promote healthy and respectful working habits, we encourage a version of a “pens down” policy. We want to help students develop ways of practicing architecture that are ambitious and deeply invested, while also sustainable over time. The intensity of architectural work can be incredibly rewarding; at the same time, we recognize the unhealthy, all-consuming work cultures that have historically existed within the discipline. The cadence of the studio—its deadlines, feedback, and expectations for incremental development—has been deliberately designed so that students should be able to complete their work by 9:00 PM on the evening before each Final Review. We encourage students to treat that time as “pens down”: to stop working, step away from the project, and arrive at the review rested and ready to engage. This is an encouragement rather than a mandate. We also recognize that creative practices are highly individual: some of us work best early in the morning, others late at night; some through sustained concentration, others through intervals of work and reflection. The aim is not to prescribe a single working method, but to begin developing an awareness of your own—one that allows intensity and inspiration to coexist with health, perspective, and the rest of a life. We hope the rhythms established in Core I can become the beginnings of effective and sustainable working habits that extend through the MArch program and into a life in architecture.

Exercise I

Design a figure and another and an other.

another:

1. used to refer to an additional thing of the same type as one already mentioned or known about; one more; a further.
2. used to refer to a different thing from one already mentioned or known about.

other:

1. denoting a person or thing that is different or distinct from one already mentioned or known about.
2. further; additional.

Considerations

The first exercise of the Core I Studio aims to highlight the value of the iterative process in architectural design. Works of architecture are compositions that enfold ordering systems, are governed by internal relationships, and abide by geometric precision. These compositions can be understood through the internal relationships that define them and, by extension, through the variability intrinsic to those relationships. Works of architecture can therefore be observed as sets of relationships open to adjustment, modification, and transformation, rather than as entities that are complete, fixed, and inert.

Throughout Core I, we will discuss student work by identifying the relationships most important to a project and developing a common vocabulary around them. This initial exercise foregrounds that approach so that subsequent exercises can build upon a shared, foundational understanding.

Guidelines

Each student will inherit a two-dimensional figure. That figure is comprised of lines, arcs, and circles governed by relationships—to one another, to a site or grid, and to a context defined by edges of different types. There are relationships embedded in the figures that students may readily observe through analysis. Equally important are those relationships that students will discover, imagine, and imbue in the figures. This exercise prompts students to make use of and balance two invaluable tools in architectural design—observation and imagination. Students are asked to observe the figure they have selected and understand it through its relationships, and then imagine variations of those relationships in order to make iterations of that figure. The figure students receive will act as “Page 0” and “Page 100” of an “Iteration Catalogue,” a kind of flipbook

containing 99 other versions of the given figure that, when viewed together, resemble a circuitous and meandering loop.

The design process is anything but linear; the collection might therefore be composed in various “acts,” “divergences,” or “restarts.” Students should consider the overall structure of the catalogue and take a position on how its meta-narrative is understood: as “a story in three acts,” “a set of seven digressions,” “one long transformation there and back,” or another structure of their own invention.

Drawing and tracing will be done using a straightedge, compass, circle template, perhaps atop a light table. Each new figure should be understood as a variant of or departure from the previous figure, abiding by construction lines, key points of reference, proportional systems, and in some cases bespoke jigs or templates that organize and precisely sequence its development.

How construction and figure lines are drawn—and with which instruments—will influence how the figure and its relationship to the page are read. Giving graphic primacy to the figure with a wide line from a technical black ink pen might showcase its transformation as a seemingly autonomous object, whereas leaving the build-up of construction lines legible and of nearly equal graphic weight might highlight the rationale for the figure's siting on the page. Students should test different graphic techniques with the aim of aligning conceptual intent with the graphic qualities of the drawings.

Finally, students should consider the project-management implications of making 99 drawings. Each drawing, once the approach is understood, should take no more than 2–3 minutes to complete, including setup. This pedagogical contrivance privileges repetitive and iterative process, encourages students to enter the rhythm of tracing, and rehearses the act of versioning. The final deliverables will include the 101-page Iteration Catalogue bound with a binder clip, and a Movie of Iterations, which can be made with a partner and a phone camera; the slow-motion setting may be appropriate to test.

Exercise 2

Design a mask that conceals and reveals.

mask:

1. a cover for the face; that which conceals the face, especially a cover with apertures for the eyes and mouth; a visor; designed to conceal the face from beholders.
2. that which disguises; any pretense or subterfuge.

conceal:

1. to withhold from view or perception; to obscure, shelter, disguise, or make inaccessible.
2. to hide; to withdraw from observation; to cover or keep from sight.

reveal:

1. to make perceptible; to disclose, expose, or bring something previously unseen into view.
2. to make known something before unknown or concealed.

Considerations

This exercise is concerned with the reciprocal relationship between representation, materiality, and identity. The mask occupies an unusual position within architecture. It might begin as a two-dimensional figure, acquire depth and thickness through making, and ultimately find its completion only when it is inhabited by a body. As such, the mask is simultaneously drawing, object, spatial proposition, and an expression of identity. Each of these manifestations offers different opportunities for architectural discovery, and no single manifestation is sufficient to convey the conceptual intentions of the work.

The mask also presents an architectural paradox. It is an instrument of concealment that simultaneously produces expression. It protects anonymity while constructing identity. It obscures a face while making another visible. Rather than treating these apparent oppositions as contradictions to be resolved, students are asked to understand them as productive tensions capable of generating architectural ideas. Expression, in this context, should be understood not merely as facial expression, but more broadly as the outward manifestation of identity, character, and disposition. The exercise asks how architecture mediates between private and public selves, between interior experience and outward appearance.

The face should be understood as a site upon which the mask is situated. Like an architectural site, it presents a set of given conditions—contours, projections and recesses, symmetries and asymmetries, edges, and depths—that may be engaged, extended, obscured, or resisted. Its

openings mediate sight, air, sound, and speech; its surfaces establish opportunities for contact, separation, support, and attachment. Rather than treating the face as an image upon which an object is placed, students should first develop ways of observing it architecturally: through measure, contour, angle, alignment, depth, aperture, and movement. Observation thus becomes a precondition of the creative act. The design of the mask begins by considering where it touches and where it pulls away, what it covers and what it exposes, what it aligns with and what it disrupts—in other words, with an architectural act of siting.

The relationship between two and three dimensions is central to the project. The initial drawing should not be understood simply as a representation of the mask, nor the physical artifact as merely the realization of the drawing. Rather, each mode of representation should be regarded as an opportunity to ask different questions of the work. The drawing allows students to speculate on geometry, pattern, symmetry, and graphic composition. The physical mask introduces questions of thickness, curvature, weight, structure, fabrication, and the relationship between object and body. Movement between these modes should be understood as iterative rather than linear, with each informing subsequent decisions in the other.

Exterior and interior elevations, together with horizontal and vertical sections, offer distinct ways of understanding the mask: as an outward-facing figure, as a surface oriented toward the body, and as a spatial relationship between the two. Material studies should similarly allow geometric order developed in two dimensions to be tested, calibrated, and transformed through making. Planar or semi-rigid materials that can be cut, folded, bent, laminated, or joined may provide a particularly direct relationship between drawing and construction.

Finally, the mask should be understood as an architectural proposition rather than as costume or sculpture. It establishes a threshold between body and world, negotiates vision, enclosure, exposure, and orientation, and transforms the relationship between an individual and those around them. Through the design of a mask that both conceals and reveals, students will investigate architecture's capacity not only to shape space, but also to shape presence, perception, and participation.

Guidelines

Each student will design a mask. The mask should establish a precise relationship to the face through conditions of contact, separation, support, aperture, and movement. The final artifact should be wearable, while acknowledging that wearability alone is not the aim of the exercise. Drawing and modeling should operate reciprocally throughout the design process, with elevation and section used as active instruments of design rather than simply as documentation. Students

should consider where the mask is supported, where it separates from the body, how it accommodates sight, air, sound, and speech, and how its interior and exterior surfaces differ. The exercise anticipates architectural considerations that will become increasingly consequential throughout the semester: apertures, structure, enclosure, thresholds, the circulation of air, sight and sound, tectonics, representation, and ritual.

Large-Scale Assembly

Following the review of the individual masks, a small selection of projects will be collectively curated for continued development as large-scale assemblies. These assemblies should not be understood as enlarged reproductions of the original masks, but as architectural transformations of their conceptual, geometric, and tectonic logics. Students will work in groups to reinterpret the ideas embedded within a single mask, allowing them to evolve into spatial installations that can be occupied by approximately three people. The transition in scale should prompt new questions rather than simply larger dimensions, as concealment and revelation, interiority and exposure, identity and collectivity are reconsidered within a shared environment.

The assemblies provide an opportunity to investigate relationships between parts and wholes. Individual components that were once understood as continuous surfaces must now be conceived as assemblies of distinct elements, requiring decisions about joints, sequencing, hierarchy, repetition, and structural logic. Students are encouraged to speculate about systems of construction, methods of fabrication, and the reciprocal relationship between material, craft, and form. The assemblies should reveal not only their overall conceptual intentions, but also the means by which they are made. Questions of precision, tolerances, connections, and structural stability become architectural design problems rather than merely technical considerations.

Working collectively also transforms the nature of the project. The original masks negotiate the relationship between a single individual and the outside world. The assemblies instead establish conditions for multiple occupants, producing shared spatial experiences while retaining the conceptual tensions that motivated the original work. Rather than functioning as objects to be viewed, the assemblies should become environments that choreograph movement, orientation, proximity, and encounter. In this way, the project marks the studio's first sustained investigation into architecture as a constructed spatial condition rather than an isolated artifact.

As the masks are transformed into large-scale assemblies, students should consider how an object might retain something of the identity or character that gave rise to it while becoming distinctly architectural. The expressive qualities of the mask need not disappear as it acquires structure,

scale, and occupation; instead, they might become the basis for architectural decisions: an aperture might become an opening or threshold; a fold might become an enclosure; a graphic line might become a structural member; an expression might become a spatial atmosphere. The distinction between object, character, and architecture is intentionally unsettled. Architecture becomes a means through which an idea or character acquires material, spatial, and social form.

We will use wood to make the large-scale assemblies. At the smallest scale, wood is laminar and lacelike; at our scale, it is strong but light, solid but pliant. These properties give rise to its familiar formal versatility: we encounter wood as sticks, sheets, and blocks, and as frame, screen, and mass alike. Wood is particularly distinctive among architectural materials for the legibility of its grain, which has a double meaning: it refers both to the lines that register across the surface of a plank and to the nested layers of density within it. Both interior structure and surficial expression, these two senses of grain are tethered by the cuts through which we transform trees into architectural material. How we cut wood—whether along or across its grain, whether with a knife or a saw—has implications for both its tectonic capacity and its graphic expression. How we put it together—whether with screws, glue, joinery, or friction alone—similarly conveys an attitude toward the relationship of part to whole, and toward the productive tension between abstraction and articulation.

Exercise 3

Design a hall for one, for some, and for all.

hall:

1. an area in a building onto which rooms open; a corridor.
2. a large room for meetings, concerts, or other events.
3. an event at which an official addresses an audience by answering questions posed by individual members.

Concert Hall

Dance Hall

Dining Hall

Entrance Hall

Exhibition Hall

Great Hall

Hallway

Prayer Hall

Reading Hall

Town Hall

Village Hall

Considerations

During Exercise 3, students will design a hall for the Department of Architecture community. The hall will be a place for events of several kinds and scales—in both size (space) and duration (time). This exercise will be an opportunity for students to consider the body(ies) in relation to four scales of design—that of the furniture element, the room, the building, and for some, beyond, to the urban scale. The role of the body will be considered in spatial, circulatory, and ergonomic terms. Simultaneously, we will be considering the hall as providing experiences for individuals, groups, and collectives.

The following events should be considered, among others, to be held in this hall:

One:

Reading Nook(s)

Study Carrel(s)

Individual Prayer Space(s)

Zoom Niche(s)

Some:

Architectural Design Review (Small, 6-10 Individuals)
Group Discussion Space

All:

Architectural Design Review (Large, 20 Individuals)
Lecture and Film-screening (Amphitheater Seating)
Circulation through the Hall
Temporary Exhibition

Other:

Storage (Chairs, A/V Equipment, Lectern)

It is important that the program be considered not only in spatial terms that involve the calibration of dimensions to the scales of particular events, but also in terms of time.

Understanding and designing around the frequency, duration, and cyclicity of events will be an important aspect to the project. There are a wide variety of approaches to address the programmatic complexity of the project that should be considered; these range from, perhaps, a reliance on flexibility by way of mechanisms, movement and mobility, to the usage of semantic and graphic tools, to more minimal and well-calibrated, fixed configurations. It should be noted that solutions engaging moving parts—projections screen, door swings, as existing—are likely the exception rather than the default/norm.

Context

The location of the hall will be what is currently known as the Long Lounge. There are several layers of context that the hall design will engage; some directly and physically, others abstractly or conceptually. The most immediate context within which the hall will engage is the walls, floor, and ceiling of the existing Long Lounge. The interior liner of the existing Long Lounge will be the primary site of your investigation. Also to be considered, is what is ongoing behind the surfaces of the walls, floor, and ceiling, in terms of the thickness of poche, the structural/tectonic conditions within the walls, and the spaces beyond the thickness of the walls. Sectionally, in the transverse, the Long Lounge is uniquely situated between the dome of 77 Massachusetts Avenue and the building's entablature. It is also special in that it has access to light by way of skylights above, and by way of the portico below. Planometrically, the Long Lounge is part of a system of corridors

(some of which are ramped to contend with different sectional conditions between neighboring buildings) that should be maintained. Some of the themes around the objects that were designed in Exercise 2—forms of continuity and discontinuity, modulation of pace through architectural cues, orchestration of movement and pause—could provide a launching pad for your conceptual design thinking for solutions for the hall.

Modes of Representation

In Exercise 3 we will be focusing on two primary categories of representation that will help us to develop and convey the narratives that your designs support. We will be deeply invested in (A) the plan and section, as devices to illustrate the interiority of the hall, and (B) physical models of different scales and types—ranging from small study models to large scale models. There will be a range of other modes of representation potentially utilized in a supplemental capacity as well—scenario diagrams, interior elevations, reflected ceiling plans, perspectives, and collages, among others.

We will launch Exercise 3 through observational drawings of the site, and sketch models as projective responses to the students' observations. Consider a pair of types of observational drawings; the five minute observational drawing, and a second as a sixty minute observational drawing, or a survey. These different periods of time should prompt students to observe in distinct ways, both through quick deduction of distinctive characteristics that define the site generally, then through more measured consideration of aspects of the site which benefit from more time to emerge. A survey drawing, by definition, is "an accurate drawing, to scale, prepared by a 'surveyor' showing the results of the survey delineating all pertinent information." The information that students draw is open to interpretation of what is "pertinent," but these drawings should be made to scale, and should be accurate to existing conditions. As always, please keep in mind that the way that one observes, and the terms by which one defines a condition, are often the very same terms by which one designs, imagines, and transforms the found condition.

Exercise 4

Design a building that is a part and stands apart.

part:

1. a piece or segment of something such as an object, activity, or period of time, which combined with other pieces makes up the whole.
2. some but not all of something.

apart:

1. (of two or more people or things) separated by a distance; at a specified distance from each other in time or space.
2. to or on one side; at a distance from the main body.

Context

Next year, the MIT SA+P will migrate to establish its new home in the Metropolitan Warehouse. In parallel with this move, we will design a building that will act as a mid-campus beacon to project the impact of past, current, and future work of MIT SA+P faculty and students to the broader MIT community and to the public. It will act as a kind of archival annex, a counterpart to the new studio and laboratory environment that we will be collectively contributing to at the Metropolitan Warehouse. The new building will be a container for collection, a space for projection, and a center for connection. More specifically, the building will be an exhibition hall to display and curate work—both new and from the historical archives—an auditorium to hold events, symposia and lectures, and a visitor center to provide linkage to the public. The building will be both *a part of* the MIT institutional context as well as be *apart from* it, distinguishing itself as an entity that provides a connection between the MIT SA+P Archive and the public.

The site is located within the court framed by Buildings 1, 3, 5, and 7, to the southeast of the site for Exercise 3, Long Lounge. MIT has a long history of building in on itself, and this strategy of growth through increased density has many instantiations across campus. Sectionally, the site is incredibly rich, having intriguing characteristics at multiple scales. At an architectural scale, there are sectional shifts that will need to be negotiated as one connects between two, three, or all four existing buildings. At an institutional scale, there are opportunities to engage the subterranean network of corridors that exist under much of MIT's campus. And at an urban scale, there are rich challenges to be worked through in order to connect the new building to the city.

We will begin the exercise by developing thorough understandings of the complexities of the site through close observation. At the outset of Exercise 4, students are asked to consider one of a series of lenses to perform a close reading of the existing physical site conditions. Aspects of the four buildings that surround the site to be considered are elevational patterns and differences, sectional shifts and floor-plate spacing, plan configurations in the zones that meet the walls that define the court, and the definition of structural patterns across the four surrounding buildings. Other aspects of the site to be considered are the sectional characteristics of the ground of the court in two directions, ground plans of the neighboring buildings in anticipation of the eventual requirement to connect the new building to the public, and the sunlight and sightlines that penetrate the court.

It would be beneficial to consider the act of drawing upon the existing conditions as an exercise in *drawing out* new information, new relationships, that are, perhaps, not readily observable or that have been until now overlooked. This allows the exercise of site observation to be a generative one, revealing previously unknown relationships within the site and, in turn, providing opportunities to intervene. This method of observation should yield a discovery about the site that could become the underpinning of a project.

Acts of *drawing out* begin by looking closely. Using the lenses, below, as vehicles for your group's observations, draw out one or more existing condition(s) in a set of drawings. Work together to come to *collective conclusions* regarding the information that emerges from the mapping, drawing, notating done on site. Emphasis is to be placed on *what you see together*, or the material content of the actual building site being observed. Additionally, please consider the impact of *how you see together*, or the techniques by which observations are translated into drawing. Techniques of emphasis may include selective use of color, contrast through increased detail, lineweight, selective elimination of information, or hatches, to name a few. Include dimensions and annotations where needed. Possible drawing types include floor plans, reflected ceiling plans, exterior and interior elevations, building wall sections, and axonometrics, among others. Students will contribute their drawings and findings to the collective documentation shared drive [here](#).

Six Observational Lenses

Enclosure, Apertures, and Material

Building Elevations & Sections; Photographs

Spatial Organization, Circulation, and Adjacencies

Floor Plans studying plan relationships between zones, circulation, and program

Building Form and Structure

Structural Plans & Sections; Massing Diagrams

Ground, Access, and Subterranean Conditions

Site Sections; Access and Threshold Diagrams mapping points of entry, ramps, stairs, and transitions amidst and between ground levels

Edges, Enclaves, and Public Space

Site Plans at various scales (i.e. figure-ground from above vs through buildings noting public space)

Orientation, Exposure, and View

Sun-path and shadow studies; sightline diagrams; environmental overlays

Program

Storage - 11,500 sq. ft. (Approximately 50%)

Archive (Storage of flat files, models, and texts.)

Conservation Lab

Freight Elevator

Research - 4,600 sq. ft. (Approximately 20%)

Reading Room (Visiting the objects from the archive.)

Workshop/Classrooms

Materials Library

Event - 6,900 sq. ft. (Approximately 30%)

Auditorium with A/V Room (Double-height; Provide raked seating.)

Gallery

Visitor Center

Circulation (As needed; typically 30% additional sq. ft.)

Total - 34,500 sq. ft. (+ approximately 10,000 sq. ft. dedicated to circulation)

Considerations

Students should be thinking through the distribution of program following the conceptual logics that have been established in observational drawings at the outset of the exercise. Sequencing and access are two important lenses through which to consider the ordering of program. Students should be mindful of the different itineraries that constitute the use of the building. There are members of the public, visitors, and the various members of the MIT community—staff, researchers, faculty, students. It is likely that each of these user groups has a different itinerary throughout the building. The mapping of these distinct yet interwoven itineraries should be regarded as an important way to understand and evaluate the organization of the building.

Note that there are aspects of the program that are designed, from a pedagogical perspective, to provide opportunities to develop and demonstrate three-dimensional dexterity. The area of the program, when the square footage of the circulation is included, is more than 1X the square footage of the area of the courtyard. Additionally, the Auditorium with A/V Room is required to have raked seating and should be a bonafide auditorium with opportunities for distinct lighting set-ups, etc.; this will yield a significantly larger sectional dimension than the rest of the program. Each of these aspects of the program should be addressed explicitly, and understood to enrich the massing and/or composition of the parts of the building.