

2026 MIT SA+P 4.288

Preparation for SMArchS Urbanism Thesis

Room W41-1303

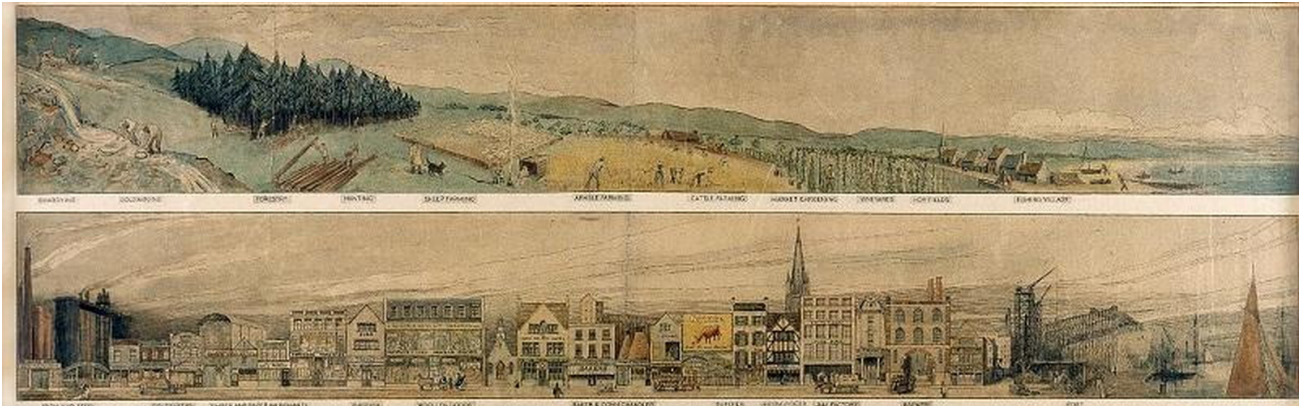
Tuesdays 10-1pm

Units: 3 - 0 - 6 G

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Native Habitat and Their Urban Manifestations

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

The thesis inquiry is an opportunity to develop a sustained and original investigation in architecture, urbanism, landscape, and design. This course prepares students to develop a clear thesis question, position the question within an existing field, identify appropriate methods and experiment with modes of representation. Rather than producing the document at the end of the semester, this class approaches it as an iterative process of testing, debating and revising the following questions:

What is your thesis question?

What do you aim contribute to the field?

What do you aim contribute to the world?

How will you make impact?

What are your research methods?

How do you organize your thoughts, sources, images, data?

What will be your final presentation format and outcome of your thesis?

Who is your audience?

THESIS PROPOSAL + LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Creating a thesis proposal and research plan is a process, it takes time and several iterations. In this thesis prep class, you will work continuously on questioning and refining the thesis proposal over the course of the semester, presenting it once to critics, before a final presentation in mid-December. Your thesis proposal document will be 20 pages in length, with text and images. It will include:

- an abstract
- a problem statement which identifies and articulates a significant problem or question
- a hypothesis, argument or proposition in relation to the problem or question
- a description of the current landscape through within relevant scholarly, disciplinary and professional fields.
- a description of actors, scales, systems, and temporalities
- conceptual framework and research method
- a realistic work plan for thesis semester (timeline and goals)
- analysis of primary and secondary sources. Organize them with proper citations and bibliographies. This includes sourcing images. Recommended use of [Zotero](#) and the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

A strong thesis proposal articulates a clear position, a profound question, an understanding of the field, appropriate research methods and evidence, and a realistic thesis semester plan. You will be expected to experiment with mapping, drawing, diagraming, data visualization, modeling, and other forms of representation in parallel with writing iterative drafts. You will be expected to communicate your thesis clearly through oral and visual presentation as well as written text.

Weekly assignments must be saved in the designated dropbox folder by 9:00am on Tuesdays before class starts. During class you will be expected to give and receive constructive criticism.

Class Schedule

Week	Topic	Expectation	Format
1. 9/15/26	Introduction and Discussion	Share where you are in your thesis journey. What you are looking forward to in the process.	In person
2. 9/22/26	Friends and Foes	Present your thesis themes and goals in relation to five examples. Include at least one publication, one built project and one theoretical project.	In person
3. 9/29/26	Thesis Proposal V1	500 words, 5 min presentation, and one unique illustration (or other visual media)	In person
4. 10/06/26	Thesis Advisor and Readers feedback	Deadline to Confirm Thesis Advisor (email Kateri by 5pm)	In person
10/13/26	NO CLASS	Monday Schedule	
5. 10/20/26	Temporality and Visualization	Five unique illustrations (or other visual media). Present your thesis in relation to five	In person

			additional examples from other creators.	
6.	10/27/26	Gap Analysis Thesis Proposal V2	Present a gap analysis of your topic/theme. Situate your project within relevant scholarly, disciplinary, and professional fields	On zoom
7.	11/03/26	Actors, Scenes, and Actions		On zoom
8.	11/10/26	Mid Review Presentation Thesis Proposal V3	10 min presentation	In person
9.	11/17/26	Final Presentation Format Discussion	Deadline to Submit Thesis Reader(s): Email Kateri with names, roles, and email addresses of Thesis Committee members (you must submit at least 1 reader). Thesis Proposal Final Review space needs requests due via Google Form Due Nov 20.	On zoom
10.	11/24/26	Corners, Sidewalks, Streets, Sites, Cities, Countries Thesis Proposal V4	Prepare a	In person
11.	12/01/26	Penultimate Presentation	Peer feedback	In person
12.	12/08/26	Optional Check in		In person
13.	12/11/26	Final Presentation Thesis Proposal V5		In person

Week 1 September 15 Introduction

Share where you are in your thesis journey. What you are looking forward to in the process. Discuss possible themes, partners, sites, temporalities and advisors.

Week 2 September 22 Friends and Foes

Present your thesis themes and goals in relation to five examples. This exercise will help anchor your thesis position within a lineage of historical, cultural, political, or technological processes that have produced the built environment in the past or in the future. You will present these “friends or foes” as aligned with your goals or critically divergent. Include at least one publication, one built project and one theoretical project.

You will start setting up appointments with potential advisors/readers for the week of Sept 28-Oct 5.

Week 3 September 29 Thesis Proposal V1

This may seem early, but given the institutional deadlines for selecting advisors, you will be asked to produce a first draft of your thesis proposal. This version will contain a minimum of 500 words, a 5 min slide presentation, and one unique illustration (or other visual media). You will be expected to present the slides and bring a printed copy of your illustration to class.

Week 4 October 06 Thesis Advisor and Readers feedback

This week you will be sprinting to meet with several potential advisors and readers. You should provide maximum flexibility to accommodate their schedules and always be respectful. In class you will be sharing presentations of feedback you have received from thesis advisors/readers and your plans for course correction and advancement. Ask your advisor for 5 recommended readings or projects.

Deadline to Confirm Thesis Advisor (email Kateri by 5pm)

Week 0 October 06 NO CLASS

Week 5 October 20 Temporality and Visualization

Urban projects take time and multiple phases. Consider seasons, social events, construction schedules, political timelines, cultural calendars, vegetative growth patterns, tides, climate change, phasing plans and other temporal factors which will influence your project. Create five unique illustrations (or propose other visual media opportunities). At least one should be a timeline. Present your thesis in relation to five additional examples from other creators.

Week 6 October 27 Gap Analysis + Thesis Proposal V2

Present a gap analysis of your topic/theme. Situate your project within relevant scholarly, disciplinary, and professional fields. A spreadsheet will be provided as a guide, and you should be prepared to present your collection to your peers.

Week 7 November 03 Actors, Scenes, and Actions

This exercise will ask you to imagine your thesis as a film. Who are the protagonists and antagonists? What is the scene you imagine? You do not need your space, site, location yet. What types of plot twists and actions do you imagine as your film unfolds? What will be the ending, optimistic? Pessimistic? Unresolved? Be prepared to present this assignment to your classmates through slides, comics, gif, video or a story board.

Week 8 November 10 Mid Review Presentation + Thesis Proposal V3

Prepare and present a 10-15 min presentation. Everyone should contribute to the discussion with constructive feedback.

Week 9 November 17 Final Presentation Format Discussion

Through this exercise we will sketch, story board and discuss what form(s) you want your final presentation to take place. Understanding size, space, ambition will also help you in forming your final presentation material.

Deadline to Submit Thesis Reader(s): Email Kateri with names, roles, and email addresses of Thesis Committee members (you must submit at least 1 reader). Thesis Proposal Final Review space needs requests due via Google Form Due Nov 20.

Week 10 November 24 Corners, Sidewalks, Streets, Sites, Cities, Countries
Thesis Proposal V4

Prepare a series of maps, drawings or videos of potential sites. You may have multiple sites, small sites or large sites. Draw and describe relevance to your inquiry drawing from social, cultural, political, technological and economic contexts.

Week 11 December 01 Penultimate Presentation + Peer feedback
Be prepared to present your 15 min presentation to your peers. Everyone should contribute to the discussion with constructive feedback.

Week 11 December 08 Optional Check in

Week 12 December 11 Final Presentation + Thesis Proposal V5

THESIS COMMITTEE GUIDELINES

[Thesis Committee Guidelines](#) are posted in your handbook.

SMArchS Thesis Committees

The SMArchS thesis committee is composed of at least two and no more than three members. The thesis supervisor must be a permanent faculty member* of the MIT Department of Architecture. The first reader must be a permanent faculty member of the Department of Architecture or in a related department at MIT. The third member (second reader) may be any member of the MIT faculty or research staff, an outside professional, or a faculty member from another institution. The academic advisor must approve the committee composition.

Co-thesis supervision is permitted as long as one of the supervisors is a permanent member of the Department of Architecture faculty. The other supervisor may be any member of the MIT faculty or research staff, an outside professional, or a faculty member from another institution. You need a minimum of an advisor + reader for your Thesis Proposal DocuSign to be generated by Drop Date; you have until 2/1/27 to add your optional third committee member.

USE OF AI ON ASSIGNMENTS

Since a central goal for this thesis prep class is to help you develop your own ability to create, articulate and diagram your own unique project, you will be practicing your written, visual, and oral communication skills. You are discouraged from using AI tools to generate text and images for papers and presentations, unless using AI is part of your investigation. If you do use AI, you must note where and why. Any work submitted using AI tools beyond these acceptable uses may be considered a violation of academic integrity, with the possibility of a referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (OSCCS).

ABSENCE POLICY

Work in the thesis prep class will build sequentially. Therefore, student commitment to incremental development on a weekly basis is of great importance. The nature and pace of this class necessitates regular attendance and requires that deadlines are consistently met. Attendance in class and for the duration of all formal reviews is mandatory. Greater than two

absences from class without a medical excuse supported by a doctor's note, communication from Student Support Services (S³), GradSupport, or verifiable personal emergency could result in grade reduction.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Massachusetts Institute of Technology students are here because of their demonstrated intellectual ability and because of their potential to make a significant contribution to human thought and knowledge. At MIT, students will be given unusual opportunities to do research and undertake scholarships that will advance knowledge in different fields of study. Students will also face many challenges. It is important for MIT students to become familiar with the Institute's policies regarding academic integrity, which are available at the Academic Integrity at MIT: A Handbook for Students.

WRITING AND COMMUNICATION CENTER

You are strongly encouraged to make use of the MIT Writing and Communication Center, which offers valuable support at any stage of the writing process. This is particularly important for international students. The WCC at 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. The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing classroom presentations & conference talks as well as designing slides). The WCC also helps with all English as Second Language issues, from To register with our online scheduler and to make appointments, go to <https://mit.mywconline.com/>. To access the WCC's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/>.

DIVERSITY

MIT values an inclusive environment. We hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider it to be a place where you will be treated with respect. We welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with us.

GRADE EVALUATION

1. Class Participation and Weekly Assignments.....50%
2. Thesis Prep Mid-Review20%
3. Thesis Prep Final-Review and submission30%

Evaluation will consider the quality of the work as well as the development of the thesis over time.

GRADING DEFINITION

The final grade will represent the balance of attendance, participation, engagement in class discussions, incorporating feedback, completion of assignments, individual growth over the semester and quality of work produced during this thesis prep semester, with an emphasis on clarity and originality. The following criteria will be used for assessment and evaluation:

- A. 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.
- B. 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. 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. 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.