

U89 AMCS 420: The History of American Architecture

Instructor: Michael Allen

Spring 2016 | Tuesdays, 6:00 – 8:30 PM | Eads 204

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Office hours by appointment.

“What the people are within, the buildings express without.”

Louis Sullivan

“The perennial architectural debate has always been, and will continue to be, about art versus use, visions versus pragmatism, aesthetics versus social responsibility. In the end, these unavoidable conflicts provide architecture's essential and productive tensions; the tragedy is that so little of it rises above the level imposed by compromise, and that this is the only work most of us see and know.”

Ada Louise Huxtable

American architecture is so much more than Frank Lloyd Wright, although the architect remains essential to understanding the history. The spectrum of building activities in what would become the United States of America began with native mound building, blossomed with pueblo building in the southwest and took on European influences with the arrival of settlers from Spain, England and France. By the time that Wright designed his first building, there were long traditions in both common (“vernacular”) building types and architect-designed buildings. The story of American architecture is a story that can be fully understood through examining the pathways of immigrants, the rise of real estate capitalism, the growth of cities, the refining of architecture as a profession and the public imagination of what architecture should tell the world about the ideals of the nation.

The central questions of this course follow: What are the definitive characteristics of American architecture? Do the characteristics of American architecture reveal the social, economic and political structures of its production? Ultimately, can we read an American building to reveal sense of national identity, individual political agency, the evolution of gender roles, the assertion of disciplinary and economic power, and the evolution of the American artistic sensibility?

This course begins with a thorough survey of the historic development of American architecture, starting with a chronological reading of styles, forms and major architects. Then the course pivots by examining the intersection of architectural and urban history. Other units in the course will critically examine the question of authorship, the social determinants that bear on domestic architecture and the popular lives of buildings through media and inhabitation.

This course fulfills the Humanities and Social Science distribution requirement for the AMCS MA program.

Readings

There are five required texts (both available in the campus bookstore):

1. Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context* (University Press of New England, 1999; ISBN: 1584651369).
2. Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (Trinity University Press, 2013 ISBN: 159534151X).
3. Gwendolyn Wright, *Building The Dream* (The MIT Press, 1983; ISBN: 0262730642).
4. Louis Sullivan, *The Autobiography of An Idea* (Dover Publications, 2009; ISBN: 048620281X).
5. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of American Form* (The MIT Press, 1977; ISBN: 026272006X).

Other required readings are accessible on Blackboard (<http://bb.wustl.edu>) or will be distributed in class.

Required Work

Response Papers (5 at 10% each)	50%
Final Project	30%
Attendance and Participation in Discussion	20%

Field Trips

There will be two field trips on Saturdays outside of normal class meeting times exploring sites relevant to the themes of the course.

Attendance at one of these field trips is mandatory, unless exceptional circumstances exist in which case an assignment will replace the trip.

Field trips will form the basis for the midterm assignment, so attendance at both is strongly encouraged.

Response Papers

There will be five response papers to readings that should be 4-5 pages long. The prompts for the papers will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard, since course activity will influence the exact questions for each paper.

If any student needs an extension on one of these papers, s/he should ask for one at the start of the class *before* which the paper is due. One extension will be granted, but only if it is requested according to the requirement listed on this syllabus.

Late papers will lose 3 points for each day they are not submitted. Email is an appropriate way of submitting a paper, and will be counted the same as paper submission.

Grades will be returned by the start of the next class.

Group Reports

Students will work in groups to make presentations at least twice during the semester. These exercises are noted on the syllabus and will be explained in class ahead of time. Groups will foster dialogue and shared learning, as well as allow for students to take the reigns of the course. These exercises are considered part of instruction and are not graded.

Final Project

The exact prompt for the final paper will be distributed in class, and will entail a substantial paper of 10-15 pages. The final paper will be based on selection of a topic (building type, style, or architect studied in class) related to a building, architect or style.

Academic Integrity

Needless to say, you are responsible for adhering to the university's academic integrity policies (for a full articulation of them, see <http://studentconduct.wustl.edu/integrity/policy>). In particular, you are expected to **produce your own work**, to **avoid inappropriate collaboration** (especially on the written assignments), and to **avoid various other forms of academic dishonesty**, including falsification of data and misrepresentation of sources.

Failure to cite and formally acknowledge your sources constitutes plagiarism, and will result in a failing grade (and likely disciplinary action within the bounds of Washington University's usual policies). You should produce work that is *very clear* in its acknowledgement of others' work – not only quoted material, but ideas and language as well. This is a standard of quality research that you are expected to meet. *When in doubt, cite!*

Citations and Formatting

All work for the course should use **the Chicago Style of documentation** (footnoting of each source each time you quote, paraphrase, summarize or otherwise reference it – see http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html or other such sources for guidance). Please use **an 11-point font, double space your work, and provide page numbers**.

Schedule

January 19

Introductions / Presentations

Viewing in class: *The Fountainhead* (1949; King Vidor, director)

Readings (ahead of class):

Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer, "Client and Architect" (on Blackboard)

The Fountainhead: Everything That's Wrong With Architecture

Lance Hosey, *ArchDaily* (14 November 2013)

<http://www.archdaily.com/447141/the-fountainhead-everything-that-s-wrong-with-architecture>

Frank Lloyd Wright and Ayn Rand

Peter Reidy, *The Atlas Society* (7 July 2010)

<http://atlassociety.org/objectivism/atlas-university/new-to-ayn-rand/launchpad-blog/3828-frank-lloyd-wright-and-ayn-rand>

Theme: Surveying the History of American Architecture

January 26

Lewis Mumford, "A Backward Glance" (on Blackboard)

Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, chapters 1-3.

Paper #1 due.

February 2

Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, chapters 4-6.

Andrew Jackson Downing, "Rural Adaptation" (on Blackboard)

February 9

Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, chapters 7-8.

Paper #2 due.

February 16

Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, chapters 9-10.
Henry Russell-Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, "The International Style" (on Blackboard)

February 23

Film Excerpt During Class: *Visual Acoustics*

Mary Reid Brunstrom, "Four Decades of Modern Architecture in St. Louis, 1928-1968: An Expanded View" (on Blackboard)

Helene Lipstadt, "Co-Making the Modern Monument: The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Competition & Saarinen's Gateway Arch" (on Blackboard)

Other readings TBD

*Group reports based on assignments.
Paper #3 due.*

Theme: Architecture and Urbanism

March 1

Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism*, first half.

FIELD TRIP

March 5

Saturday Field Trip: Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

Guest guide: Bill Wischmeyer, architect

10:00 AM

March 8

Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism*, second half.

Charles Marohn, "Stroad Nation," *Strong Towns* (August 25, 2014)
<http://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2014/8/25/stroad-nation.html>

Toby Weiss, "A White Flight Tour Up West Florissant Avenue to #Ferguson and North St. Louis County," *B.E.L.T.* (September 7, 2014)
<http://www.beltstl.com/2014/09/a-white-flight-tour-up-west-florissant-ave-to-ferguson-and-north-st-louis-county/>

Midterm Paper Due in Class

Midterm Break
No class March 15

Theme: Authorship and Architecture

March 22

Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea*, p. 1-183.

Group reports on reading.

FIELD TRIP

March 26, 10:00 AM

Downtown St. Louis and Souldard led by the professor.

Meet in front of the Old Post Office, 815 Olive Street.

March 29

Sullivan, *The Autobiography of an Idea*, p. 183-328.

Alexandra Lange, "Seven Leading Architects Defend the World's Most Hated Buildings," *New York Times* (June 5, 2015)

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/05/t-magazine/architects-libeskind-zaha-hadid-selldorf-norman-foster.html?_r=0

April 5 – **Class cancelled**

Film Viewing in Class: *My Architect* (2003; Nathaniel Kahn, director)

Ada Louis Huxtable, "Exeter Library: Paean to Books", "The Meaning of a Wall" and "Seeking the Father, Finding the Architect" (on Blackboard)

Theme: The Right to Architecture

April 12

Henry Wright, "The Sad Story of American Housing" (on Blackboard)

Civic League of St. Louis, *Housing Conditions in St. Louis* (1908; on Blackboard)

Wright, *Building the Dream*, chapters 1-8.

Paper #4 due.

April 19

Wright, *Building the Dream*, chapters 9-14.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Case for Reparations, *The Atlantic* (June 2014)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

Joe Cortwright, "In Defense of Gentrification," *The Atlantic* (31 October 2015)
<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/10/in-defense-of-gentrification/413425/>

Theme: Architecture Intersecting with Culture and Art

April 26

Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*
Paper #5 due.

Guest Speaker: Sage Dawson, artist (<http://sagedawson.com>).

Interview with Sage Dawson:
<http://bldgculture.com/2015/10/28/archiving-the-dust-a-conversation-with-sage-dawson/>

May 3

James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation*, excerpts (on Blackboard)

Jeremy Wells, "Why Don't We Care About the Public's Definition of Authenticity?"
<http://heritagestudies.org/index.php/2015/11/29/why-dont-we-care-about-the-publics-understanding-of-authenticity/>

Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, Introduction (on Blackboard)

Guest Speaker: Bill Hart, Executive Director, Missouri Preservation

May 10

Final Paper Due, 5 PM.