ARCH BUSINESS THINKING: THE ARCHITECT AS ENTREPRENEUR

OBJECTIVE

Ask a group of architects what they wished they had been taught in school and the majority will say “the business and marketing side of the profession.” This seminar will study the past, present and future of architecture as an entrepreneurial endeavor.

Students enrolled in the seminar will learn about architects (and firms) who have managed to not only excel in the design realm, but also as business creatives and innovators. Architects who have redefined the profession from within, as well as those who have used their architectural training to build successful careers in other industries.

The objective of this seminar is to give students a better understanding of the role business plays in our profession, and invite them to think of themselves as both designers and emerging entrepreneurs.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The intersection of architecture and entrepreneurialism is not only visible in the careers of architecture school graduates like Bjerke Ingles (BIG), Tinker Hatfield (Nike), Virgil Abloh (Off-White) and Miguel McKelvey (WeWork), but it also manifests itself in business-inspired models like Design-Build and Integrated Project Delivery.
The impact of business thinking can also be seen in BIM software, whose influence on the architectural process might be compared to what Henry Ford’s assembly lines did for manufacturing. And let’s not forget the growing emphasis our profession places on storytelling practices from the marketing and advertising industries.

In addition to looking at case studies that exemplify innovative business thinking, we will invite architects to speak about what makes architectural business practices successful, profitable, and resilient. The last part of the seminar will focus on how remote work is changing the profession and the new business opportunities this model presents for the next generation of architects.

STUDIO METHODOLOGY

Coursework for the studio will include research assignments and analytical studies on the above-mentioned topics. There will also be a term project, which asks students to rethink the architectural competition from a business perspective. Each student will take a competition brief of her/his choice and explore ways to make it financially beneficial to the participants, as well as the competition sponsor. In other words, we will look at the thousands of hours participants invest and hundreds of project entries from an entrepreneurial perspective.

Invited guests from professional practice will participate in the seminar throughout the term, both as speakers on the topic of entrepreneurship and to answer student questions. What marketing and networking tools do architects use to get projects? What industries, outside of architecture, place the highest value on the training they are getting at UofO? How designers and architects use social media to reach broad audiences and potential clients?

Arch Business Thinking is a professionally oriented course. It will engage students from the School of Architecture in a multi-approach process that will give them a greater awareness of the changing economic landscape we live and work in.