Learning : Living : Harmony

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We live in a rapidly changing world… a changing environment, a changing society, with many challenges to face. But we also live at a time when we are discovering new and better ways to live in harmony with the environment, especially around the key concerns of food, shelter and transportation systems. As a society, we are also emerging new ways of living in harmony with each other, within the rich diversity of community, and within new forms of family. Yet, even today, places to learn about these new ideas are often few and far between, or narrowly specialized in one realm or another, while broader community access to this knowledge base remains greatly lacking. In meeting the challenges ahead, access to localized knowledge and education about ecological resiliency and adaptability will be vital to resilience, especially in the event of environmental, societal or medical crises.

In response, this studio’s project will be the design of an ecologically-sustainable-living education and incubator center in Eugene, that will provide both long-term resident-programs and short-term community programs and resources on the topics of ecologically-responsible building, urban food production and alternative transportation. In addition, it will serve as a research/maker space and demonstration facility, providing hands-on exploration in those same areas. It will provide both short-term housing and longer-term housing in a co-op setting for visiting teachers, staff, and students. The program will also include extensive outdoor spaces, including greenhouses, demonstration building and garden spaces, and community event spaces. The facility and its programs are intended to combine the best of programs such as Ecosa Institute, Yestermorrow, Rural Studio, Center for Regenerative Studies, and Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems. There will be two local-Eugene sites to choose from, one urban, one rural.

As a preface to our design work, we will consider the architectural implications of various ecological design concepts and frameworks such as Biophilia, Permaculture, Ecorevelatory Design, Systems Thinking, Emergent Design, and Ecomorphogenesis. With that base, we will also explore ways to synergistically integrate, and make architecturally expressive, various ecological design strategies such as bioclimatic design principles, active renewable energy systems, as well as water-efficiency and water reclamation systems, in built environments designed to use alternative, environmental building systems and materials, but also endeavor to make architectural expression arise from each. Along the way, we will be developing the designs in reference to the AIA-COTE Framework for Design Excellence.

Students will work in teams for research and analysis, and then as individuals, or as a team of two, on design solutions for the education center. The primary focus will be on how architectural expression and building systems co-evolve in synergy with an ecology, in creating an armature for educating the students and community about sustainable building, urban agriculture and alternative transportation. Toward that end, the studio will include inventory and analysis of ecologies; strategies for development of conceptual solutions arising from synergies of people, place, program with those ecologies; culminating in design solutions employing ecologically-conscious site strategies, building structures and envelopes; and passive and active concepts, techniques and systems for energy-, water-, and materials-efficiency. Designs will then be conceptually assessed under the AIA-COTE Framework for Design Excellence ecological assessment framework, and made initially ready for optional entry in the COTE Top Ten Awards student competition for 2021.

The studio will be taught primarily through an online learning environment, that uses virtual studio spaces for group and individual student work, built around a robust integration of digital, real-time interactive whiteboards, and parallel web-conferencing for audio and video interaction. Though students are asked to be available during scheduled studio class hours, a portion of the class will be directly interactive and synchronous, while much will be based around exercises and assignments that can be done off-line and asynchronously. The studio will include a combination of readings, presentations, virtual “field trips”, and dialogues with outside project-related parties, in addition to large- and small-group and individual discussions about project conception, design, development and documentation, in the virtual design studio structure. Some studio work and individual meetings may optionally be done in-person at UO campus facilities, as well as possible field trips off-site, all per UO & SAE Covid-19 protocols.