The course’s premise is that our ordinary experiences with buildings can open a window onto the discipline of architecture as a whole. By means of site visits to buildings around Ann Arbor and its environs, we will engage the architecture of past periods as well as inquire into the relationship between people and buildings today. Thus, the course concerns the history of architecture, but also architectural criticism. You will learn to understand buildings in relationship to history and the cultures that made them, based on the tools of historical research and writing as well as formal and spatial analysis. But you will also be asked to assess how historic and more recent architecture is currently perceived as well as used by considering them in light of today’s cultural values and applying analytical methods borrowed from other disciplines, including environmental psychology. The broad goal of the course is to help you develop a more conscious and meaningful relationship to the built environment around you.

While nothing can replicate the direct experience of a building in real space, architecture by its nature depends on representation—words but especially images—for its creation, construction, and even appreciation. Thus our site visits will be supported by visual material. You also will be asked to study and make drawings (at whatever level of your ability) and will learn about other forms of architectural representation, including diagramming, photography, and film.

The course will include guest speakers with expertise on particular buildings and subjects. Weekly site visits will take us to university and other public buildings, but also to private residences, including Frank Lloyd Wright’s Palmer House. The main requirements will be a journal/sketchbook and two projects that involve direct experience of buildings in relationship to the themes of the course.