

Telling Stories!

WINTER 2015 URP 551/Arch 506 - Physical Planning and Design Workshop - UM TAUBMAN COLLEGE - Fridays 1-4 pm - 2222 A&AB
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"Stories are central to planning practice [...] we use stories in process, as a catalyst for change, as a foundation, in policy, in pedagogy, in explanation and critique as well as justification of the status quo, and as moral exemplars. [...] My approach is not uncritical. We still need to question the truth of our own and others' stories. We need to be attentive to how power shapes which stories get told, get heard, carry weight." -- L. Sandercock, Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice (2003)

COURSE OVERVIEW

Welcome to ARCH506 / URP551! This is a project-based, three-credit course that introduces core disciplinary competencies in Physical Planning and Design and engages in the spatialization of socio-environmental and culturally rooted processes in the built environment. This Winter 2025, we are partnering with the City of Dearborn to learn about the many stories seeded in the city's public realm. Founded in 1786 and incorporated in 1929, Dearborn is well-known as the Ford Motor Company hometown and the first Arab-American majority city in the US. Through the archiving and unarchiving of stories around Dearborn's public spaces, we will learn about the diverse cultural traditions and local communities they serve, the environmental functions they play, and the many meanings of belonging and difference they enable.

Telling Stories contends that planners' and designers' agency lies in their capacity to uncover new meanings and co-produce more complex and nuanced stories of place. Open to MArch, MLA, MUD, and MURP students, the workshop provides a dynamic learning experience integrating lectures, readings and discussions, software tutorials, and site visits (yes, we will be out of the classroom often!). This semester, we will exercise different research methods, including archival research, questionnaires, in-depth interviews and oral histories, and mapping and counter-mapping techniques. We will work incrementally, learning about different elements and methods of physical planning and urban design and experimenting with thick mapping techniques as a medium to develop critical readings of place and time. In the final stage of the semester, we will select a subset of sites to develop and use socio-environmental storytelling to reflect on the evolving nature of public spaces, their uses and users. Together with our local partners, we will propose a conceptual framework and initial design ideas for a subset of relevant sites. As a final output, we will compile the semester's work in a comprehensive digital StoryMap or alternate digital platform.

LEARNING GOALS

During the semester, you will:

- Compile, synthesize, and assess relevant information addressing multicultural perspectives.
- Inform and conceptualize your ideas based on research on socio-spatial, historical, political, cultural, environmental, and local sources.
- Identify the diverse constituencies at play shaping public space, their agendas, and the importance of participatory processes.
- Establish a clear basis for compiling, editing, and organizing relevant data.
- Use appropriate graphic representation and digital visualization media in 2d and 3d to convey socio-spatial attributes.
- Assess the impact of regulatory frameworks, cultural practices and human behavior in the built environment.
- Learn from relevant precedent studies, assessing their transferability and replicability.
- Exercise critical thinking and promote inquisitiveness, questioning the potential bias of information sources, using abstract ideas to interpret information and considering diverse points of view in your recommendations.
- Integrate interpersonal and cross-cultural communication techniques effectively, mobilizing a range of media formats and targeting broad audiences.
- Work in collaboration with peers, embracing difference, building mutual trust and performing different roles to broaden the scope and diversity of perspectives in your work.