

University of Michigan II Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning
ARCH 509 II Winter 2026
Instructor: Adam Fure (afure@umich.edu)
Thursdays, 8:30am - 11:30am

Second Skin

Course Description

This seminar will investigate **skinning, wrapping, and coating** buildings as speculative strategies of adaptive reuse. Rather than focusing on preservation, restoration, or replacement, we will consider how the architectural envelope can serve as a site of cultural, technical, and aesthetic intervention. The semester will unfold in three interconnected stages:

Reading and Discussion

We will begin by engaging with key texts that theorize the building envelope and adaptive reuse as critical domains of architectural production. Writers from architectural theory, cultural studies, and material science will help frame our conversations around the role of the envelope in shaping spatial, social, and environmental conditions.

Research and Case Studies

Building on this theoretical grounding, students will conduct research into the technical aspects of envelope design. Topics will include building systems, codes and standards, performance, materials, and construction methods. Students will investigate case studies to analyze how envelopes negotiate durability, climate, and aesthetics. This stage will emphasize both traditional research and visual documentation, with the goal of becoming conversant in the full spectrum of design and technical considerations.

Design Proposal

The final stage will ask students to synthesize their theoretical and technical research into a design proposal for the re-skinning of an existing building. Each student will select a building to study and then propose a speculative envelope intervention. Design work will be supported through traditional architectural methods—drawings, physical and digital models—as well as emerging tools such as AI image generation, allowing students to test multiple approaches to representation and speculation.

Learning Objectives

- Understand theoretical discourses around the building envelope and adaptive reuse.
- Gain technical literacy in envelope design, codes, and construction.
- Develop skills in research, precedent analysis, and critical interpretation.
- Produce a speculative design proposal that synthesizes theory, research, and design.
- Experiment with both conventional and emerging representational tools.