RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
School of Environmental and Biological Sciences Department of Landscape Architecture
STUDIO ONE 16:550:531 | 5 credits | Fall 2026

Instructor:
Holly Nelson
Blake Hall, rm. 116 holly.nelson@rutgers.edu

Office hours: Before and after studio on Monday/Thursday and by appointment
Studio sessions: Tuesday 12:10-5pm + Thursday 10:20-3:20pm
Common Lecture: Wednesday 3:50 – 5:10pm

Course Description
The first design studio introduces landscape architecture as a way of seeing, thinking, and making. Studio explores how the organization of landscape elements can shape space and, in turn, shape human experience. Students learn to observe and analyze landscapes, recognize relationships among landform, water, plants, structures, and movement, and translate those observations into spatial ideas.

The first studio establishes a designer's way of seeing. Before students can confidently design complex landscapes, they need to learn how to observe relationships, recognize spatial qualities, abstract them, and translate them into design intentions.

Design is an iterative process of speculation, making, testing, critique, and revision. Through drawing, modeling, grading, site observation, and other forms of experimentation, students develop the ability to move from an observation or idea toward a purposeful spatial proposition. The studio therefore emphasizes not only what students design, but how they learn to think as designers through three fundamental propositions:

- **Space is the fundamental medium of landscape architecture [Project 1]**
  Students therefore need to understand how landform, water, vegetation, and structures can be organized to define, connect, enclose, direct, frame, and transform space.

- **Design is a process of thinking through making [Project 2]**
  Students cannot learn design simply by learning principles or looking at examples. You learn by experimenting, speculating, testing, receiving criticism, revising, and making decisions.

- **Landscape design shapes human experience [Project 3]**
  Landscape is not simply scenery or an arrangement of objects; it creates spatial conditions in which people live, move, gather, encounter nature, and experience place.

The goal of the first studio is to establish a foundation in the language, principles, and processes of landscape design while cultivating the curiosity, imagination, critical judgment, and fluency of expression needed to design landscapes that are purposeful, productive, and provocative. You will develop a way of seeing and thinking that allows you to transform observations, ideas, and intentions into spatial form.

Learning Objectives
The studio develops five core capacities that help you to learn how to shape space, translate abstract/ compositional ideas into landscape and develop fluency in communicating your design ideas. By the end of this studio, students will be able to:

1. **Translate ideas into spatial form**

Use principles of **organization, composition, hierarchy, rhythm, movement, proportion, scale, and spatial sequence** to transform conceptual ideas into three-dimensional landscape spaces.

2. **Use representation as a design tool**
   Employ drawing, diagramming, mapping, modeling, collage, and other representational techniques to **explore, communicate, and develop design ideas**, rather than simply document finished designs.
3. **Observe, analyze, and interpret landscape and spatial conditions**
   Identify and interpret the physical, social, cultural, and perceptual qualities of a site as a foundation for design.
4. **Develop and evaluate design ideas**
   Generate, test, and refine landscape design ideas through an iterative process of observation, analysis, experimentation, critique, and reflection.
5. **Recognize and apply design principles across disciplines**
   Analyze works of art, architecture, and landscape to identify underlying organizational and spatial principles, and translate those principles into landscape design without relying on literal imitation.
6. **Communicate and critique design**
   Clearly articulate design intentions and decisions through verbal, graphic, and written communication, and use feedback and critique to evaluate and improve design work.

Program Goals

1. Prepare students for professional careers where they contribute to the development and environmental stewardship of resilient and site-sensitive places based on a foundation of design, science, and scholarship.

2. Learn to analyze, comprehend, and design a site based on its spatial quality, terrain, and history of place, soil, water and plants, building materials and the expectations and needs of its users.

3. Engage in and conduct original scholarly work resulting in a rigorous master's thesis or final project.

Major Assignments

Project Descriptions:

Three projects of increasing complexity introduce students to *design as a process*, wherein a concept is refined and developed through iterative exploration and revision. Projects and associated exercises are intended to engage students in an investigation of graphic language and representation.

Project 1 | Design + Landform

Introduces basic design theory, spatial organization, and craftsmanship through a series of two-dimensional compositions and three-dimensional topographic studies. Students investigate principles of form, space, and order and translate two-dimensional compositions into three-dimensional topographic interpretations. The project introduces landform as a fundamental medium for shaping space and begins to explore the relationships among form, scale, spatial organization, movement, and plant material.

Project 2 | Design + Composition

Emphasizes the translation of an abstract idea/concept into a landscape design. In this project, a painting becomes a design diagram: students analyze an artwork to identify its underlying organizational, spatial, and compositional principles and translate those principles into a landscape proposal without literally reproducing the artwork. Through a sequence of three-dimensional study models, conceptual and measured drawings, diagrams, and sections, students progressively develop and communicate their design ideas. Attention is given to the relationship between form, composition, and spatial experience, as well as using the section as a tool for understanding and shaping changes in landform. The project demands increasing technical skill in drawing and grading landform while reinforcing the iterative nature of the design process.

Project 3 | Civic Rooms

Introduces students to the fundamental principles of landscape design through the design of a small-scale public space. Students investigate how landscape elements—including landform, vegetation, materials, enclosure, circulation, and water—can be composed to create spatial

character, sequence, movement, and opportunities for social interaction. Through site observation, precedent analysis, drawing, modeling, and iterative design, students develop a design concept and translate it into a coherent spatial proposal. Grounded in Gordon Cullen's theory of serial vision, the project emphasizes the relationship between form and experience, asking students to consider how the organization of space can shape how people move through, occupy, perceive, and engage with a place.

Expectations of Student Participation + Attendance

Students are expected to participate fully in class by being prepared, engaging actively in discussions and critiques, and using class time productively for drawing, modeling, experimentation, and design development. Because design is an iterative process, students should bring work in progress to class, respond constructively to feedback, and take responsibility for advancing their own projects between meeting.s

Each student is responsible to track their own academic progress throughout the semester. Interim grades will be available to students on Canvas. Students may make an appointment with the instructor to review interim grades. Appointments must be made at least one day in advance of any meeting.

Attendance

The Department of Landscape Architecture requires attendance in all its classes. **Studio includes Lecture, Studio and Common Lecture with occasional field trips.** Attendance at scheduled Studio, Reviews, and Lecture sessions is mandatory. If a circumstance arises which prohibits your attendance at any class session, please notify the instructor 24 hours prior to the class and an alternative arrangement may be made. You should also self-report your absence due to illness. https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/

There will be no opportunity to make up a missed Review, in-class exercise or lecture.

Course Components

PROJECTS

For each "major" project you will receive sub-grades: design concept and development [how well did you develop your design ideas over the duration of the assignment to meet the stated project goals and provide a creative expression]; drawing craft [the quality of your final drawings]; and model craft [the quality of your final model]; readings and written assignments. Unless otherwise specified in the project description statement, each of the components will be weighted equally.

HOMEWORK

Expect to develop your project for each class. Typical assignments ask you to make drawings or models. Failing to complete any assignment [for example, developing three alternative designs when four were assigned] or not demonstrating progress in design development [for example, simply re-drawing what was discussed the day before rather than applying the critique to a revised design] will negatively affect your project grades. Specifically, you risk failing the design concept and development component of your grade, and further, the opportunity to develop representational skills may contribute to poor drawing and model craft skills.

READINGS

Assigned and on Canvas Reading List.

JOURNAL

Design development (i.e. PROCESS) should be recorded in a design journal that will be handed in for evaluation. The journal should engage the processes of site observation and representation as well as lecture notes (including common lecture), your discoveries about design, and the design process. Remember: you will need to pace yourself and keep up with your journal entries. **You are expected to produce, over the semester, a minimum of 50 pages of thoughtful notes, sketches, diagrams, etc.**

SITE ENGINEERING

Supplemental lectures on site engineering have a corresponding exercise associated with the lesson. This component of the course is intended to introduce students to the basics of grading for pedestrian movement, stormwater runoff, road alignment, terracing, and other landform components. Exercises will be counted towards the overall studio grade.

Grading

Grading is based upon the individual's performance and improvement on studio projects and exercises throughout the semester. Attendance, attitude, participation and overall contribution to the studio environment will also be considered. Beyond the above recommendations, this course utilizes the Department's attendance policy:

The individual student's development in studio is largely dependent upon:

- Exposure to and assimilation of a body of information which relates to the field.
- Application of this knowledge through studio projects and problem-solving skills developed through critiques, reviews and interactions during each project.

Rutgers' Landscape Architecture curriculum is designed to develop both areas. Attendance and participation in all lectures and studios are essential if the student is to achieve his/her maximum potential. It is the policy of the Department that **more than three unexcused absences will result in a step reduction of the final course grade** [for example, a B down to a C]. Each additional 3 absences will result in another step reduction. ***Attendance will be taken at the start of each class and late arrivals of more than ten [10] minutes will be marked as an absence. Attendance is given 100 points/ semester.***

Project Breakdown Of Cumulative Semester Grade	**Points**
Project 1 | Design + Landform	100
Project 2 | Design + Composition	200
Project 3 | Civic Rooms	150
Site Engineering	100
Journal	100
Attendance	100

Departmental Grading Guidelines

While the assignment of grades is the purview of the instructor, the department uses the following guideline for understanding appropriate grading in its courses:

A – Outstanding –This not only means fulfilling the requirements but impressing and going beyond the initial expectations of the project. The student has demonstrated a superior grasp of the subject matter coupled with a high degree of creative or logical expression, and strong ability to present these ideas in an organized and analytical manner.

B – Very Good – The student has demonstrated a solid grasp of the material with an ability to organize and examine the material in an organized, critical, and constructive manner. The projects and in-class performance reveal a solid understanding of the issues and related theories or literature.

C – Acceptable –The student has shown a moderate ability to grasp concepts and theories for the class, producing work that, while adequate, is not in any way exceptional. This performance in class displays a basic familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques.

D – Unacceptable – The work demonstrates a minimal understanding of the fundamental nature of the material or the assignment with a performance that does not sufficiently examine the course material critically or constructively. Students cannot graduate from the Landscape Architecture program with 2 D's in required 550 classes.

F – Failure – The student has demonstrated a lack of understanding or familiarity with course concepts and materials. Their performance has been inadequate. Failure is often the result of limited effort and poor attendance which may indicate that the student is not in the proper field of study.

Required Materials

A list of drafting, drawing and model making materials should have been received and purchased prior to the start of class. You are required to have these materials available during each studio session.

Additional materials may be required as the course goes on. It is not acceptable for students to take time from studio to purchase materials.

Journal/Sketchbook

Each student is required to have a sketchbook/journal dedicated to studio. This is a tool in which to record design development, observations, and lecture notes.

Student Work

It is highly recommended that students keep and store all the work produced during the semester – including drawing exercises, design development sketches and study models – in a safe place. Please remember to keep your own records (photographs, etc.) of your projects as you go along.

Submitted drawings, models, photographs, or written papers for any project assigned in Landscape Architecture are considered the property of the Department and may be retained in its archives for exhibition and accreditation purposes. Should the Department retain your work, you will be given the opportunity to obtain a print, scan, or photographic record of your work.

Academic Integrity

The University's policy on Academic Integrity is available at http://academicintegrity.rutger.edu/academic-integrity-policy. The principles of academic integrity require that a student:

- Properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others
- Properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work
- Make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of impermissible materials or impermissible collaboration
- Obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions
- Treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress
- Uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing

Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to ensure that:

- Everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments
- All student work is fairly evaluated, and no student has an inappropriate advantage over other
- The academic and ethical development of all students is fostered
- The reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced

Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.

It is a violation of academic integrity for a student to aid others in violating academic integrity. A student who knowingly or negligently facilitates a violation of academic integrity is as culpable as the student who receives the impermissible aid, even if the former student does not benefit from the violation. As a result, any copying and/or sharing of exercises or projects will be treated as Level 2 violations and is subject to the sanctions as outlined in the integrity policy:

1. A failing grade on the assignment
2. A failing grade for the course
3. Disciplinary warning or probation

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services
(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / https://ods.rutgers.edu/

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the

appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form.

Student Wellness Services

Just In Case Web App: http://codu.co/cee05e
Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Share A Concern: http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help-share-a-concern/why-share-a-concern/
There are times when people may observe a behavior and feel concerned. These concerns may be part of a larger story for a student facing challenges. Thus, it is important to ***Do Something*** and share your concerns so that the student can get assistance as soon as possible before the issues grow too large. If the concern is immediate, call 9-1-1.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)
(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/
CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)
(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 / www.vpva.rutgers.edu/
The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling, and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff, and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Scarlet Listeners
(732) 247-5555 / http://www.scarletlisteners.com/
Free and confidential peer counseling and referral hotline, providing a safe and comfortable student space.