

Architecture Climate Change & Society

Buell Center
2020 Course Development Prize



Bradford Grant
Howard University

**PUBLIC ISSUES, CLIMATE
JUSTICE, AND
ARCHITECTURE**

Science, empirical evidence and some technical solutions about Global Climate Change are well documented and generally known to our upper division architecture students who have taken the required Sustainability course. While our students may understand that the world's climate is warming as an existential and profound threat for the future of our environment, we see that our thinking and action on Climate Change are influenced not only by the science, but by an array of social and political dynamics. How architects can help the client, profession and the public's understanding of the Climate Crises, influence changes in policies for environmental equity and propose a Climate Change response is the direction of this course. Student's understanding of their role as future professionals in the public process for climate change design policies, environmental justice and a call for action, is the goal of the course.

Buell Center Course Development Prize, “Architecture, Climate Change and Society”
Public Issues, Climate Justice, and Architecture Bradford Grant, Howard University

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The proposed “Public Issues, Climate Justice, and Architecture” as a required course, introduces upper division students to key issues connecting climate change and climate justice to the role of the architect via the public/civic engagement processes. The course covers responses to climate change and environmental justice through the broad public, civic and community participatory engagement in the architecture and urban design process primarily through an examination of current events, direct observations and participation in the public policy process. We address topics related to how climate change mitigation and environmental justice related to the built environment is an essential role of architects and is shaped and influenced by the public, community and cultural institutions including, government, media, and regulatory or oversight agencies. Within this context, the relevancy and effectiveness of the architecture profession in addressing the intersectionality of race, class, culture, the public process and climate smart policies are explored and examined.

The course is conceived as a “blended or hybrid course” utilizing traditional lectures and presentations along with field trips, experiential activities and online teaching technology. This blended format adds instructional flexibility, enabling the class to be off campus to participate in the numerous public forums and governmental hearings in Washington DC.

The course relies on and exploits the fact that Howard University, as a Historic Black College and University (HBCU), is located in the heart of Washington DC, with direct access to the major national environmental design professional societies (AIA, NOMA, NCARB etc.), public policy institutes (Urban Institute, Milken Institute, etc.) environmental protection and justice organizations (Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Climate Justice Alliance, etc.), federal governmental agencies (EPA, US Congress, US Supreme Court, etc.) and other institutions that are major players in the climate crisis debate. Washington DC is also the site of many important and major public protests and demonstrations, many of which incorporate environmental issues and the climate change crises as central platforms. A major component of the class is the direct public/civic engagement by students with these institutions and assemblies. The students are assigned to participate in public hearings and community meetings, observe and/or encouraged to participate in demonstrations/protests as part of the civic engagement process. The class is based upon the direct and experiential teaching/learning of climate change public awareness, policy, and action as part of the architecture and environmental design profession.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The prime objective of the course is understanding of the role of the architect, the public and the democratic process in the planning and design of our environment for climate change and climate justice. The course strives to have students understand their capacity, as future

professionals, to be agents of government, firms and institutions that regulate, design and activate our built environment for climate change.

REQUIRED and SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS and MEDIA

The course requires the students to secure or have access to the following sample/examples of assigned readings, podcasts, web links as their required text and learning media;

- Green New Deal, Jeremy Rifkin, 2019 https://www.gp.org/gnd_full
- On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal, Naomi Klein, 2019
- Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis, Al Gore, 2009
- “Climate Change Manifesto”, New Zealand Labour Party Manifesto 2017
- “Marginalized Communities in DC Are Already Struggling, Climate Change Will Make That Worse”, Kojo Nnamdi pod cast, Sept. 17, 2019 <https://thekojoannamdishow.org/>
- Howard University Sustainability Master Plan
- “Gasping for Air: Climate Change and the Black Community”, Hip Hop Caucus and Climate Change, <http://hiphopcaucus.org/>
- National AIA Commentary on Climate Change Mitigation, 2017
- “Black Lives Matter in a Changing Climate: Why Racial Equality and Climate Justice are Inextricably Linked”, Green American, Andre Floyd

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE

The 15 week semester course is divided into the following four realms to progressively build the learning/teaching of climate change and the public process in architecture;

The Personal (2 weeks): In the first portion of the semester, we explore the individual and personal realm of climate change. The architect is a member of a larger profession and discipline, but she is also an educated individual and citizen with personal agency and choice. This module is designed to have students look inward to help reveal their personal view, understanding and relationship with the climate change debate. This realm incorporates the growing theories of contemplative practices in education using reflective readings and activities along with lectures and discussions. The central explorative assignment of this realm is the creation of a personal Climate Change Manifesto, a personal carbon footprint and what each can do individually to reduce their impact on the environment.

The University (3 weeks): We continue and grow our exploration beyond the personal evaluation to the University as the context. We utilize Howard University’s campus environment that the students have been embedded in for the last four to five years, are very familiar with and is the public institution they know best. Along with discussions, readings, video and lectures, the central explorative assignment for this realm is for each student to actively participate in and critically report on one of the numerous campus student groups, activities or clubs that addresses and/or considers the broad issues of climate change, environmental justice or related “green” concerns on or around the campus and/or beyond.

The City and District (4 weeks): For this realm we move to the District of Columbia, its communities and Wards as the urban context for our understanding and investigation of climate change, the public and the built urban environment. Learning how communities and local District government understands and acts on climate change and justice connected to urban and community design through the public engagement process is the experiential lesson. For the central exploratory assignment, students will meet with, engage in and critically report on District Council meetings, local public hearings, community activist leaders and/or protests related to issues of climate change, environmental justice and urban design.

The Nation (5 weeks): For our last realm, we look to and take advantage of the Federal epicenter of Washington DC to explore national debates and policies focused on the climate crisis. The key exploratory assignment and learning experience of this period is for the class to organize to attend, report on and provide public testimony to either congressional representatives, congressional hearings, judicial court hearings, or other Federal executive agencies related to the environment, infrastructure, urban design and climate change. Howard University students come from a variety of regions of the country and they are directed to meet with their local congressional representatives to question and discuss issues of climate change action and legislation. This realm results in the final major term project of researching and preparing a new draft proposal for a federal or local bill, law, or resolution addressing climate smart policies and environmental equity. The students are to complete their final term project utilizing the 51th anniversary of Earth Day (April, 2021) as the organizing national theme and date for the final project presentation and submission. Their final climate change draft legislative proposals are to be submitted to the appropriate authorities for consideration, publication and/or action.