Not for Sale!
Housing Education at the Intersection of Activism, Architecture, and Advocacy

2024 AIA/ACSA Housing Design Education Award
Table of Contents

p3. Abstract  
p4. Ideological Context  
p5. Pedagogical Structure  
p6. Venice Biennale Learning Laboratory  
p7. Examples of Student Work
Abstract

Not for Sale! is an innovative studies abroad course on contemporary housing that takes place at the 2023 Venice Biennale of Architecture. The course teaches students about the complex interrelationships between design, public policy, finance, and political action while allowing them to directly participate in an activist campaign against commodified housing.

The course invites students to collaborate with participants in this ongoing housing campaign. Altogether, students work with ten activist organizations, ten architecture practices, and ten advocates. This diverse group includes experts on housing commodification’s disproportionate impact on the working class, women, and racialized people. Almost one-third of campaign participants are Indigenous activists, architects, and advocates who are at the forefront of examining the relationship between colonization and housing.

Thirty students are subdivided into teams who collaborate with a subset of activists, architects, and advocates to determine campaign tasks in a bottom-up fashion. Student work has included such things as researching new collective ownership models, designing a prototype for off-grid housing for Indigenous women and girls, developing a social media campaign around a gentrification tax, and case studies of intentional communities for unhoused people.

Two separate universities jointly offered this for-credit course to both undergraduate and graduate students. Both universities have provided generous financial support to ensure equitable access. The course, which runs for five months, takes place inside an open-to-the-public pavilion on the grounds of the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy – an historic first. This setting affords students the opportunity to make connections with the larger body of work at the Biennale while engaging visitors as an immediate experience in architectural activism.

Architectural activism is a vital frontier in architectural ‘practice.’ Through collaboration, discussion, research, drawing, modelling, and action, this course equips students with the means to create housing that is socially, ecologically, and creatively empowering for all.
Ideological Context - Against Housing Alienation

The course introduces students to the concept of housing alienation. Contemporary housing in North America is characterized by unaffordability, disrepair, under-housing, precarity, and homelessness. This is housing alienation—the condition of being separated from our fundamental connections to home. It separates us from the land we inhabit, the social world that supports us, and our full creative lives. We believe the current housing system must be abolished!

We are informed Madden and Marcuse’s writing on ‘residential alienation.’
Pedagogical Structure – Learning Within a Campaign

Throughout the course students are active participants within the Not for Sale! campaign – working to further ten demands that form the core of the campaign. This occurs through periodic in-person and regular virtual meetings with housing activists, architects, and advocates with deep experience in housing issues. Students contribute to the overall campaign through varied work ranging from research reports, to events, to design drawings, and to popular media. This pedagogical structure affords students a unique opportunity to learn and grow on multiple fronts. It increases their knowledge about the design of housing and its relationship to critical challenges around issues of affordability, spatial justice, and human well-being. It provides invaluable first-hand experience in how architectural thinking and tactics can play a role in an expanded definition of architectural practice – that of the architectural activist.

The Campaign’s Ten Demands

1. Land Back!
2. On the Land Housing!
3. First Nations Home Building Lodges!
4. Reparative Architecture!
5. A Gentrification Tax!
6. Surplus Properties for Housing!
7. Intentional Communities for Unhoused People!
8. Collective Ownership!
9. Mutual Aid Housing!
10. Ambient Ecosystem Commons!

The Collaborative Field

(protest installations)
(housing designs)
(case studies)
(research pamphlets)
(campaign events)
(social media)

students

activists

architects

advocates

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Venice Biennale: Laboratory of the Future

This year’s Biennale, curated by Lesley Lokko and titled Laboratory of the Future, is in many ways unprecedented. Never before has the Biennale included predominantly small and young practices. It is the first to foreground the African diaspora. It is a highly political Biennale overtly challenging dominant power structures in the quest for a better world. We feel this is precisely the location to situate students learning how to create more empowering housing for all. Students from University A, accompanied by a professor from that university, were in Venice for roughly the first half of the Biennale and students from University B, are in Venice for roughly the second half of the Biennale, again accompanied by a professor from their respective university.

![Studies Abroad](image)

Lesley Lokko, curator
Student Work

The following pages include examples of student work completed in the course to-date. The selected work included in this award submission is associated with five of the ten campaign demands. For each demand, students worked in teams of three, and in collaboration with the activists, architects, and advocates working on that specific demand. Students met with these activists, architects, and advocates in-person in Venice as well as plentiful meetings via Zoom. The work of University B is ongoing.

The following applies to all student work samples on subsequent pages.

**Project Title:** Each student work sub-section is titled at the upper left

**Month/Year Completed:** July, 2023

**Role of Nominee:** Course Instructor & Campaign Organizer

**Collaborators & Funding Source Expenses:** This course plays a vital role within the context of an architectural activist campaign and associated exhibition at the 2023 Venice Biennale of Architecture. The overall effort involves more than 100 individuals, including activists, architects, and advocates (excluding students). Every participant has been financially compensated. Excluding direct funding to students, as described below, the total project costs are approximately $450,000 USD. This funding has been provided by a major federal government arts agency, and two separate regional architectural advocacy organizations.

**Student Compensation:**

- All students receive 8-credits for enrolment in the study abroad course.
- University A and University B have jointly provided direct funds to students in the total of $108,000 USD. This translates to an average of $3,600/student which covers airfare and substantially offsets living expenses for each student’s three month stay in Venice.
On the Land Housing!
(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

Northern Indigenous people demand that housing funding be given directly to Indigenous led organizations to provide women-focused-on-the-land camps so that young Indigenous women can access a sense of home in a safe community environment. Students worked with an Indigenous activist and architect to explore a possible prototype design. These are samples from design work on an individual dwelling prototype as well as potential on-the-land community configurations.
**DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR OFF-GRID COMMUNITIES**

**SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

- **Transportation Hub**: Storage for renewable energy resources and guide to solar panels around each building.
- **Community Dining**: Common dining area for shared meals and social interaction.
- **Public Amenity Buildings**: Places to gather, such as community centers and libraries.
- **Ceremonial Space**: A sacred circle location for traditional ceremonies and community gatherings.
- **Outdoor Living**: Outdoor picnic tables for large outdoor events and special occasions.
- **Common Area**: Open space for community events and gatherings.

**COMMUNITY LAYOUT PROPOSALS**

- **Circumferential**:
  - Circular plan places communal space central to the entire community.
  - Playgrounds are placed at the ceremonial center.
  - Paths and outdoor eating areas are planned for the ceremonial building.
- **Branching**:
  - The branching plan maximizes central communal space.
  - Playgrounds are placed within the central communal space.
  - The branching plan provides a sense of safety and security.
- **Linear**:
  - The linear community maximizes communal space.
  - Playgrounds are placed within the central communal space.
  - Community spaces are dispersed along the central trail.

By utilizing the transportation hubs, the integration of the community, efficient movement, and social interaction are emphasized.
On the Land Housing!
(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

Northern Indigenous people demand that housing funding be given directly to Indigenous led organizations to provide Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQ2SIA+ persons a secure and nurturing sense of home. Students worked with a Dene architect to develop a toolkit to work with communities members to design, site and inhabit an on the land community.
Surplus Properties for Housing!
(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

To help achieve the demand that all levels of government make available surplus public properties assets available for the development of affordable housing, students have created an inventory of surplus properties in a case study location of Halifax, Nova Scotia. To further demonstrate the viability of this demand, they have selected one specific school and designed a phased transformation into affordable housing.
THE FUTURE OF ST. PATRICK'S ALEXANDRA SCHOOL IS UNCERTAIN.

In response to the critical need for housing in Seattle, local design students are working on a social housing project for people who are formerly incarcerated, and help of homeless in housing support.

IMMEDIATE ACTION 1 MONTH - 3 YEARS

INTERMEDIATE 3 YEARS - 8 YEARS

LONG-TERM HOUSING 8 YEARS+
Surplus Properties for Housing!
(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

To help achieve the demand that all levels of government make available surplus public properties assets available for the development of affordable housing, students expanded and developed the guidebook, designed 8 posters to be posted on surplus sites in Halifax and initiated a competition for these surplus sites.
A Gentrification Tax!
(selected examples of student work from the summer studio)

Students in the summer studio worked with an existing community land trust, an architecture practice with deep experience in affordable housing, and an advocacy group specializing in innovative tax strategies, to amplify the campaign’s demand for gentrification taxes that would be earmarked to affordable housing within community land trusts. Among other things, students researched and documented the structure of various community land trusts and created a highly inventive social media campaign.
Social Media & Architectural Activism!

Instagram
TikTok
YouTube
A Gentrification Tax!
(selected examples of student work from the fall studio)

Students worked with an existing community land trust, an architecture practice with deep experience in affordable housing, and an advocacy group specializing in innovative tax strategies, to amplify the campaign's demand for gentrification taxes that would be earmarked to affordable housing within community land trusts. They assembled an advocacy slide deck that used publicly available data to calculate how much tax would have been raised by the proposed tax in 2022 and how much housing could be built with it.
What if the Gentrification Tax was applied to the entire City of Toronto earn in 2022?

\[
\text{The City of Toronto in 2022} = 39,375 \times 87,865,412 = 3,568,338,970
\]

(\text{Could have been generated in the city of Toronto in 2023})

*Please note: This is an estimate. There are many factors that would affect this number in reality. Depending on your political views, how do you think the value generated in your ward would change?*

Exploring possible purchase sites in Parkdale-Highpark

How many affordable units could be added to the Toronto with the Gentrification Tax earned in 2022?

How many of these housing combinations could be achieved via the 2022 Parkdale-Highpark Gentrification Tax of \$ 87,005,412?

In one year the tax could fund:

- 6 = new 4-unit buildings
- 2 = existing 21-unit buildings with 4 new units in Parkdale-Highpark.

What could the results of Study A mean for the Parkdale-Highpark community over time?

How would the Gentrification Tax contribute to Toronto’s affordable housing needs?