

China Fund Proposal: GSD Spring 2010 Studio: “Landscape and Ecological Urbanism: Future Alternatives for Beijing”

The Graduate School of Design seeks funding for a studio option to be offered in Spring 2010, entitled “Landscape and Ecological Urbanism: Future Alternatives for Beijing”

Studio teaching is at the core of the design school’s pedagogy. As stated by the Dean “Regardless of differences in format, all studios have a specific pedagogical focus, although no attempt is made to comprehensively simulate office practice. Rather all studios operate within a thematic pedagogical framework with specific educational, as distinct from strictly professional, objectives. To make an analogy with certain ideas from other disciplines, the explicitly exploratory nature of design studios make them rather more speculative than simply normal or routine in their focal interests. Here advantage is also taken of a strong and broadly based program of visiting critics--another hallmark of the studio experience at the Graduate School of Design. The benefits include an added breadth of perspective, different styles of studio instruction, and a widened design outlook on the part of participants.”

Recently the opportunity arose for a distinguished alum, Kongjian Yu, to offer an advanced studio in Spring 2010 that will relate to an existing program at Peking University. Prof Yu states in the course description (appendix 2) “ As part of a multi-year research and design program, the studio series will explore the most advanced critical thinking regarding landscape and urban planning and design, especially theories and methods of ecological sustainability and landscape urbanism. These theories and methods will be evaluated across multiple sites and scales when exploring alternative future scenarios for the Beijing metropolitan area. The Beijing Alternatives Studio Series will be carried out in cooperation with Peking University, Beijing Land Bureau and Beijing Planning Bureau....” This is the first opportunity the school has had for a landscape architect from China to conduct a studio and lead a site visit in China.

“Students are expected to: (1) perform site analysis integrating various techniques including GIS, and social and economic questionnaires; (2) develop various urban and landscape strategies for the region based on thorough analysis of the landscape and ecosystems, social economic context, and regional and global comparative studies; (3) develop alternative landscape and urban design strategies for one village in the region using each of the scenarios which has been cultivated through the team’s site analysis.”

Professor Yu, an alumnus of our Doctor in Design program, is one of the foremost landscape architecture educators in China. He is the founder and dean of the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture at Peking University, the single most important training program for landscape architects in the country. He is also the founder and president of Turenscape, which is an internationally awarded firm with more than 400 professionals and is one of the first and largest private landscape architecture and architecture firms in China. Yu participated in the school’s conference on Ecological Urbanism in Spring 2009 in the roundtable discussion: *What Next? How to Bring About More Sustainable Cities*. As a landscape practitioner and academic whose interest and influence extends to planning and urban

design, Prof. Yu will provide an exceptional cross-disciplinary learning opportunity for students in these three fields. He is an influential advocate at the national, provincial, and municipal levels for ecological and environmental planning. His research with students and his associates informs the recommendations that he makes. The results of this studio will contribute to the body of knowledge that supports this advocacy.

If this studio is funded, it is our intention to have the students travel to Beijing - to get an overview of the city's urban environment and then become familiar with the project site's physical landscape. Site analysis will be comprised of natural, social, economic, historical and cultural processes. GIS and computer modeling techniques will be an integral process for inventory and analysis. There will be opportunities for interaction with the students, faculty and officials from the consortium of Peking University, Beijing Land Bureau and Beijing Planning Bureau. Members of the consortium will make presentations for the benefit of the students, and the students in turn will present their work and ideas. An optional publication would be exceedingly useful to Prof. Yu, the consortium and the students in that it would help to illustrate alternatives for development with sensitivity to ecological issues.

The school has had a fruitful relationship with China which includes many different types of engagement. During the 1990's, we had a funded program of visiting scholars from Tsinghua and several other Chinese Universities with architecture programs; our faculty have engaged in research and teaching on China; several architecture and urban design studios, seminars and architecture thesis projects have focused on various aspects of design and planning in China, and we have offered executive education programs related to development in China, specifically for Tsinghua University. We have approximately 200 alums in China, many who are now in important academic and design leadership positions. This studio will help expand these relationships, especially into the field of landscape architecture.

If this studio is successful, there is a possibility for further collaboration in future years.