

# DESIGN STUDIO FIRST AID KIT

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*The powerful wave of protests across the country and around the world in defense of Black lives have forced designers, architects, urban planners and designers, and landscape architects to confront how our professions and practices reinforce structural racism through the built environment.*

*As we reckon with needed changes and consider how to move forward with concerted action, the curricula merits special action.*

*The design studio, in particular, is a keystone of design pedagogy that embodies its strengths as well as significant tensions and contradictions.*

*Design Studio First Aid Kit is a starter set of questions to guide efforts to combat white supremacy and intersecting oppressions within the design studio.*

*It is a project of CoDesign, which seeks to embed the design disciplines in antiracist, abolitionist, and reparative practices through action research, studio pedagogy, and design activism accomplicating working-class, BIPOC movements.*

## + WHO +

WHO ARE YOU AND WHOSE INTERESTS ARE YOU SERVING?

**Consider** the privilege and power of course participants in the local context.

**Examine** the full identities and cultures of local stakeholders, centering the needs of populations that suffer multiple oppressions (e.g. race, class, citizenship, gender, sexuality, age, ableism).

**Use** the GSD's convening power, design research, and studio projects to foster local debate and dialogue in ways that challenge established power relations and templates of spatial development.

**Generate** designs that support ongoing work of local activists and community-led organizations that challenge the status quo.

## + WHAT +

WHAT WILL BE YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS—INTENDED AND UNINTENDED?

**Consider** how you are setting the problem and potential biases and blindspots in resulting spatial propositions and design proposals. The site or issue area may not suffer from an absence of design and planning interventions so much as those interventions disregarding the needs and interests of the most vulnerable groups.

**Approach** design and planning as means to challenge white supremacy and the commodification of public, civic, and urban spaces.

**Design** architectural, landscape, and urban redevelopment projects to explicitly serve racialized, low income, and such "othered" populations and their preferred uses.



## + WHEN +

**WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE YOU GOT HERE AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER?**

**Take time** to understand key historical and contemporary events impacting your issue, place, or group of interest. These include economic, political, social, spatial, and cultural trends.

**Fill in gaps** in official accounts by engaging groups most burdened by spatial development at neighborhood, local, and regional scales from early stages of course development.

This is to **better frame** course objectives and ensure the studio and its outputs are not appropriated by local economic, political, and civic leaders to exacerbate conditions of social and spatial injustice.

## + WHERE +

**WHERE IS THE SITE LOCATED AND WHAT ARE THE POLITICS OF PLACE?**

**Understand** race, ethnic, and class geographies at local and regional scales along with place-based biases and stigmas.

**Situate** your project site in relation to uneven public and private investments in urban redevelopment, infrastructures, services, and amenities. In U.S. contexts, focusing on the problems of racialized low-income neighborhoods but not problematizing resource-intensive white neighborhoods shows double standards at play.

**Marshal** your skills and influence as design faculty and students to challenge territorialized concentrations of power and resources, whether in elite enclaves, prestigious institutions, or civic centers and monuments.

## + WHY +

**WHY IS THE STUDIO BEING OFFERED?**

**Clarify** course aims to all participants from the beginning. Is it to engage pressing global issues and urban dilemmas of the day, inform real world projects, for fundraising and development purposes, or to teach the foundational skills of design by simulating practice? If site based, is it at the invitation of local communities? If plural, discuss potential conflicts and strategies for prioritizing and operationalizing different course aims with students, clients, partners, and funders.

**Incorporate** into the curriculum, mechanisms for reflection and dialogue on the professional roles and responsibilities of designers along with the ethics of design practice.

## + HOW +

**HOW DOES THE DESIGN STUDIO UPHOLD DIGNITY AND WELLNESS?**

**Start** from where course participants and local stakeholders currently are, including their talents and aspirations.

**Encourage** design and planning engagement beyond reiteration or intensification of the built form.

**Co- teach and create** with designers, artists, activists, and organizers from frontline communities and fairly compensate them for their time and efforts.

**Use** collective outputs to support movements for justice and liberation.

**Acknowledge, confront, and grow** from creative tension and conflict.



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