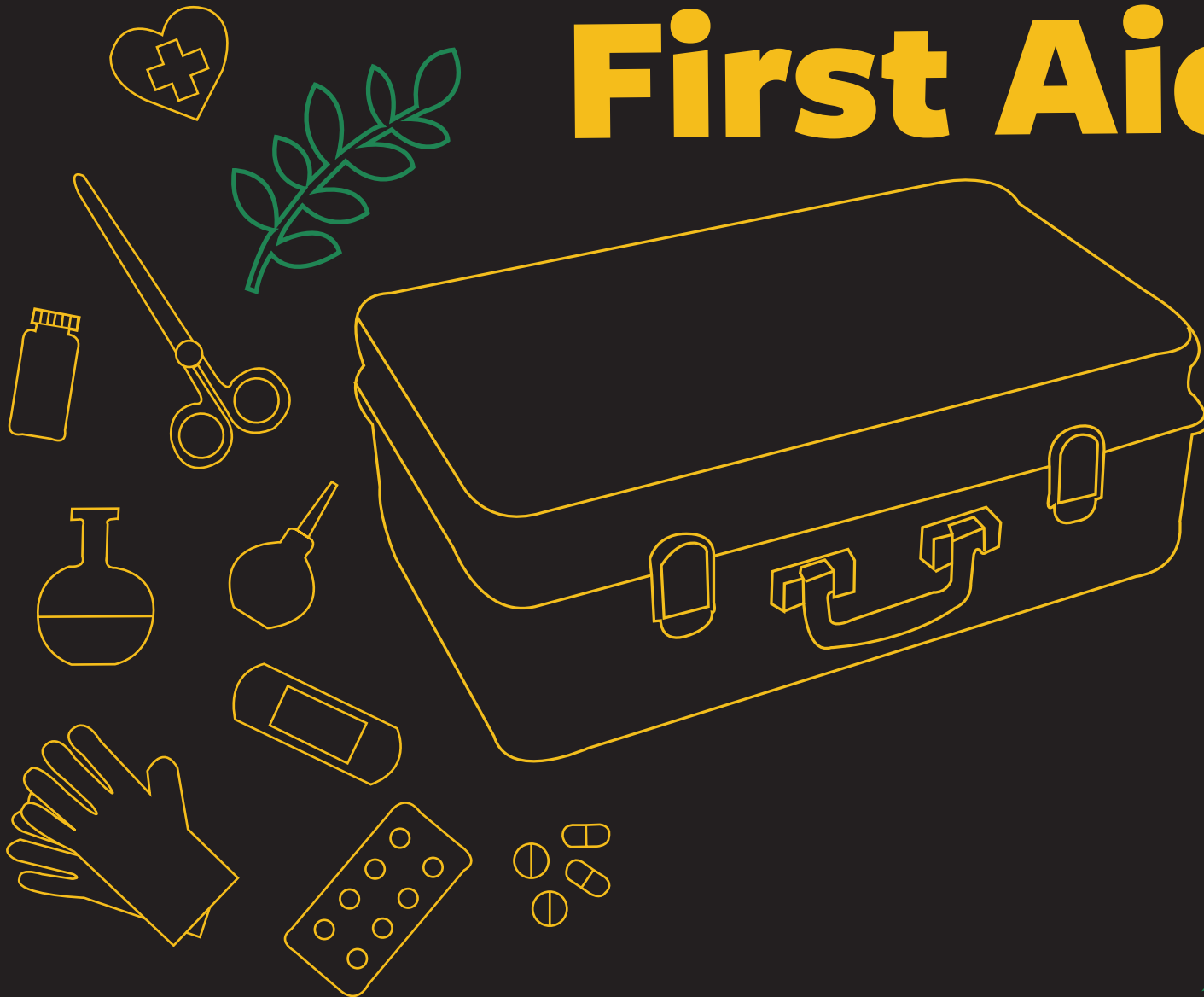


Design Studio

First Aid Kit



● By Lily Song, Harvard CoDesign & Allentza Michel, Powerful Pathways ●

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

At the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where faculty, students, staff, and alumni are reckoning with needed changes and considering how to move forward with concerted action, **the curricula merits special attention.**

The design studio, in particular, is a keystone of design pedagogy that embodies the school's strengths as well as significant tensions.

How?

Who?

Why?

What?

Where?

When?





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 accomplic-ing 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 afterwards?

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 US contexts, focusing on the problems of racialized low-income neighborhoods but not problematizing resource-intensive white neighborhood 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?

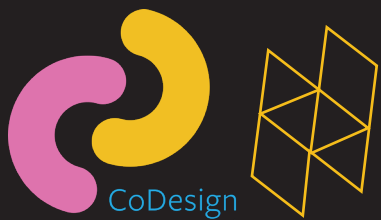
Start from where course participants and local stakeholders currently are, including their talents and aspirations.

Encourage design & 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 & efforts.

Use collective outputs to support movements for justice and liberation.

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



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