

## **Columbia GSAPP Advanced Studio IV, Spring 2016**

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### **Introduction**

Atlantic City, New Jersey was conceived in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by drawing a straight line from Philadelphia to the Atlantic coast for a speculative railroad and seaside resort. Subsequently, Atlantic City's development has been inextricably tied to speculation. Nick Paumgarten has written, "If not for zany schemes, Atlantic City would still be a sand dune." With this attitude of experimentation, the studio will envision the transformation of Atlantic City, which is threatened not only by a declining tourism and gambling economy, but also the potential impacts of climate change. A premise of the studio will be the introduction of a hypothetical, new type of campus combining higher education, research, science and technology. The goal of the studio is to not only provide a new vision for Atlantic City, but also to re-think the campus as a type and its broader relationship to city and nature.

Picking up on the themes in the broader context of "Scales of Environment" (eight sections of Advanced Studio IV sharing a common discussion while exploring unique ideas and approaches), the studio will explore compound relationships between urbanism and architecture: design proposals will be elaborated through an urban proposal, a narrative about the proposed program (its components, relationships, and potential effects), and an architectural proposal.

### **Site**

Following the completion of the Camden and Atlantic railroad in 1854, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Atlantic City underwent a building boom as megastructure-like hotels populated its boardwalk. Atlantic City thrived through the 1920's when the prohibition of alcohol and other illicit activities was, for the most part, overlooked. Its special economic and legal status, as well as the suspension of regulations within its territory, has been a unique characteristic throughout Atlantic City's history, and may be considered an aspect of future scenarios.

Following World War II, automobile and airline travel facilitated easy travel to other beach destinations and caused Atlantic City's slow economic and urban decline. To address its eroded tourism and entertainment industry, gambling was legalized by referendum in 1976 and further regulated in the 1977 Casino Control Act. Enjoying a monopoly on gambling in the region, the city boomed throughout the 1980's and 1990's. At the same time, the legalization of gambling, which was supposed to revitalize Atlantic City, did little to improve the overall economic health of the city, except for enriching the casinos and their owners.

With the recent advent of commercial gambling on tribal lands and elsewhere in the Northeast U.S. region, Atlantic City's gambling visitors and revenue have been in steady decline. In 2014 and 2015, the economic situation entered a new phase of crisis, with four of twelve casinos closing. Most notably, the Revel, completed in 2012 by Morgan Stanley at a cost of \$2.4 billion, was shut down in 2014 and sold for \$90 million.

At present, Atlantic City faces other challenges. As Paul Lewis, et. al. have noted, Atlantic City is unique in that it is a barrier island and heavily urbanized. It has been repeatedly damaged by

hurricanes, most recently Superstorm Sandy, and remains vulnerable to climate change and sea level rise. Atlantic City also has among the highest unemployment in New Jersey, lowest per capita income, low rates of literacy, and high crime rates.

The studio will focus on the northeastern tip of Absecon Island; in and around the South Inlet. This area is bounded by Atlantic Ave. to the north and S. New Jersey Ave. (and the Showboat Casino) to the west. The site includes the Absecon Lighthouse, the vacant Revel (casino, 1,400 hotel rooms, and parking), and scattered existing structures. Most of the South Inlet sits on ground that has been reclaimed since the 1880's and may be subject to future modification. The site is also notable for the existing grid, its vacant land (due to failed urban "renewal" in the 1970's), and the discrepancy in scale between existing buildings.

## Program

The studio will examine the emerging, contemporary typology of the campus which is no longer an ivory tower of higher education nor an idealized world of academic pursuit situated in a suburban or pastoral landscape. (Although it can be considered an urban campus, even Columbia University's McKim, Mead, and White 1893 Morningside Heights masterplan suggests a fortress-like organization, forming a city within a city, insulated from the outside.) Increasingly, the campus as a type has taken on an expanded program, including medical and research facilities, scientific labs, and innovation and technology incubators. Campuses now not only serve their internal community, but also provide services to their surrounding neighborhoods. Often, clusters of companies, like software, internet, or biotechnology corporations, may aggregate on or in close proximity to the campus, either unplanned or by design. This pattern can be seen in some of the following locations:

- Silicon Valley, California (Stanford University)
- Research Triangle Park, Raleigh, North Carolina
- MIT, Boston, MA
- Cornell Tech, Roosevelt Island, New York (Cornell University / Technion IIT, Israel)
- Paris-Saclay
- Education City, Doha, Qatar
- Xi'an Technology Innovation Harbor, China (Xi'an Jiaotong University)
- Hsinchu Science Park, Taiwan (NCTU / NTHU)
- Skolkovo Innovation City, Moscow, Russia
- Naukograd Technopolis, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Educational institutions have come to recognize that engagement with the city, along with its diversity of ideas and people, and absorption of the city's programmatic functions, may advance their own underlying pedagogical and institutional agendas. The result is that this new typology of campus may be considered a hybrid of public and private sector, inward and outward-looking, institutional and business-driven, and local and global. Sharon Haar says that, "education [is now more] directly connected to... the post-industrial knowledge economy." In this sense, as Pier Vittorio Aureli notes, Cedric Price's Potteries Thinkbelt (1966)— a proposal to convert a derelict industrial region and its railroad infrastructure to a post-industrial region through a decentralized and mobile educational network—seems prescient.

Students will develop case studies on these emerging campus types and propose the pilot zone for such a campus on Atlantic City. Located on the South Inlet, the frame of reference to nature

for this campus is no longer a landscape of “lawn and ivy” but rather the coastal environment of the New Jersey barrier island (beaches, sand dunes, tidal areas, etc.)

Students will develop a narrative for the programmatic functions and relationships proposed. Stockton University, a state school, has been considering opening an “Island Campus” in Atlantic City and in 2014 bought the defunct Showboat Casino for \$10/SF. Stockton now intends to sell the Showboat at a loss, after discovery of a covenant restricting its use and conversion into their new “Island Campus.” Although Stockton University has shifted their plans elsewhere in Atlantic City, they may be considered an institutional occupant (or one of several institutions) of this new campus. Equally importantly are how clusters of business or scientific or research activity may co-exist and form an overall identity for the campus and its surrounding environment and communities. Furthermore, students must propose how to re-use and/or re-program the Revel.

### **Format / Schedule**

There will be three phases during the semester:

- I. Research (2 weeks)**  
Teams of 2-3 students each will conduct site analysis and develop case studies of different campuses and relevant urban precedents.
- II. Urban and Programmatic Proposal (3 weeks)**  
Individually, or in teams of 2, students will develop a programmatic narrative and overall physical arrangements of buildings and systems across the site.
- III. Architectural Proposal (9 weeks)**  
Individually, within their urban proposal, students will elaborate a single new building or the re-use of an existing building on the site. Alternatively, students may elaborate, in architectural detail, a new infrastructure or system with the urban proposal.

The studio meets for desk crits on Monday and Thursdays from 1:30-6:30pm. There will also be Wednesday sessions from 3-5pm. Pin-ups and reviews will be announced in a more detailed schedule to be distributed at the beginning of the semester.

During January or February, we will arrange a studio visit to Atlantic City. Details to be confirmed.

All studio work will be compiled into a book summarizing the studies and outcomes of the semester.

## Readings

Aureli, Pier Vittorio. "Labor and Architecture: Revisiting Cedric Price's Potteries Thinkbelt." LOG 23 (Fall 2011): 97-118.

Haar, Sharon. The City as Campus: Urbanism and Higher Education in Chicago. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. xiii-xxx

Lewis, Paul, Marc Tsurumaki, David J. Lewis, Kevin Hayes, and Anna Knoell. "Atlantic City's Amphibious Back Bay." Structures of Coastal Resilience: Phase 1, Context Site, and Vulnerability Analysis: 119-141. Princeton University School of Architecture, 2014.

Liu, Yixin, Neha Mehta, Paul Siracusa, Annelisa Steeber, and Jared Sussman. "Promises Made, Promises Broken: An Overview of Gambling in New Jersey and Recommendations for the Future." New Jersey Policy Perspectives. Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, 2015.

New Jersey Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, Jones Lang Lasalle, and Jerde Partnership, Atlantic City Tourism District Masterplan, Volume 3. 2012.

Paumgarten, Nicholas. "The Death and Life of Atlantic City." The New Yorker 91.26 (Sep 07 2015): 56-67.