

Spring 2009 Vertical Studio: Community-Based Open Space Design for East St. Louis

Instructors: Laura Lawson and Sungkyung Lee

Given a context of engaged residents working to improve community conditions and quality of life in East St. Louis, the landscape architect's creativity and training allow him/her to conceptualize what *is* while also helping create a vision of what *could be*. Whether or not such visions become realities depends in part on community support and an implementation strategy that addresses real economic, environmental, and social concerns. This year's *East St. Louis vertical studio* will frame engagement and design investigations around new visions to promote health and wellness within the city's neighborhoods. In addition to inventorying key factors influencing current health concerns and practices and providing broadly framed visions for the city/neighborhoods, the studio will focus on two specific aspects of health: parks/open space and community food security.

This studio is committed to civic engagement as a vehicle for professional and personal development. This is a university community-learning course in which students learn about local conditions and concerns/ideals directly from residents while providing professional services to neighborhood organizations seeking to improve their communities. Students will be encouraged to develop designs that address environmental conditions, incorporate community history, satisfy residents' needs and concerns, and offer new opportunities for future generations. To encourage student reflection on professional and personal learning, class time and assignments will incorporate discussion, writing in sketchbook/journals, and other forms of dialogue.

Through readings, lectures, discussions, and exercises, students will be introduced to East St. Louis history and development, park and open space design and programming, community food security, active living, participatory design processes, community development, everyday urbanism, and more. In addition, the studio will contribute to the profession's understanding of issues related to public landscapes in low-income communities of color. There will be several mandatory fieldtrips to East St. Louis, including at the two ESLARP outreach weekends (tentatively Feb. 27-28 and April 10-11) and possible daytrips for community meetings (no cost to students and transportation provided). Graduate students are encouraged to consider thesis research as an extension of this studio experience. The course is also open to advanced students in architecture, planning, and other fields per instructor approval. For more information, please contact Laura Lawson (ljlawson@illinois.edu) and check the ESLARP website (www.eslarp.uiuc.edu).

