

Winter 2023
GRADUATE COURSE OUTLINE

COURSE CODE: URD2015YS
COURSE TITLE: Little Jamaica Studio - Urban Design Studio Thesis
PREREQUISITE COURSES: URD2013
CLASSROOM LOCATION:
CLASS HOURS: M 9-12, 2-6; Th 2-6
INSTRUCTOR NAME: Michael Piper and Otto Ojo
INSTRUCTOR EMAIL: Michael.Piper@daniels.utoronto.ca, otto.ojo@utoronto.ca
OFFICE HOURS: Th 1-2
OFFICE LOCATION: Zoom: <https://utoronto.zoom.us/j/84420837636>

Little Jamaica Studio

Guided Thesis



Site Context

Cultural practice can be understood as the preservation, expression and advocacy of a way of living as developed by a community through long standing businesses, events, social practices, and organizations. It is rooted in the tangible, the spaces, and places, but is made pervasive through the intangible rituals & traditions.

Little Jamaica is a Toronto community approximately located between Allen Rd and Keele St along Eglinton Street West. Since the 1960s, following changes to Canadian immigration policy, it has been a Toronto Staple and enclave for Afro-Caribbean Culture. The moniker “Little Jamaica” was coined in the mid 90’s where at the time the Eglinton strip boasted the highest concentration of black and west Indian business in Toronto. The moniker has since been popularized with the recognition of the significant Jamaican cultural impact on the development and identify of the city.

In the summer of 2011 work on the Eglinton line 5 “Eglinton Crosstown” transit line began and with it the subsequent disruption and decline of Eglinton Street west corridor economic and social vitality. In 2020 disruption, decline and displacement of the community only deepened as the city, country and world faced the unprecedented Corona Virus Pandemic. For over a decade, Little Jamaica has seen a loss of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Now gripped with the very real fear of gentrification, as pressure builds for redevelopment and densification along the Eglinton Crosstown corridor pending its potential completion in 2023, *how can this once vibrant community be poised to make a comeback?*

Since 2018 Community grass-roots movements and city officials have petitioned to try and preserve Little Jamaica as a heritage district, in attempts to preserve its legacy but also hold onto its living history for future generations. The City of Toronto in 2021 passed a motion for the planning and creation of a culture districts program, in collaboration with an equitable place-making practice. Little Jamaica will be the pilot and first of these districts to be proposed, planned, and implemented in the city.

Cognizant of this what are the ideas of cultural heritage unique to Little Jamaica? What would a city cultural district designation mean and look like in the context of Little Jamaica? Are they new cultural urban planning models emerging out of our collective peri-pandemic experience that can be utilized?

Guided Thesis

This course framework broadly situates urban design as a practice of engaging economic, political, or social conditions in a specific context; and creating a building and/or open space design that addresses this engagement.

This semester offers student’s a guided thesis: a self-initiated project within a framework provided by the course. Students will be asked to describe their interests in practices, methods, aesthetics, and/or conditions. These may include, for example, concerns for ecology, the design of public space, housing, or an interest in incremental form. At the same time, they will be introduced to a specific community area, its stakeholders, and the social economic, and political contexts that are effecting it. This community area will include a series of potential focus sites and projects. Course instructors will work with students to identify one of these projects that relate best to the interest that they have identified, or to define a project based on self-initiated research. They will then be asked to explore their interest on this site, researching the given context, and developing a design proposal that synthesizes these two efforts.

Potential Focus Sites / Project Topics

Public Space 1: Street Design

Following the construction of the new LRT, Eglinton West is in the process of being rebuilt. Current designs employ a relatively standard set of components including bike lanes, ecological systems such as curb drains and tree planting. This project will be asked to explore the existing social and spatial character of the neighborhood and to develop a street design guide that builds on this character. The project should address ecological issues such as water drainage, planting strategies, and heat island while also developing an aesthetic guide for social space including street furniture, gathering areas, and other public space.

Public Space 2: Parking Lots to Public Space

One example of social resilience in Little Jamaica has been the transformation of existing parking lots into social spaces. For example, the Afro-Caribbean farmers market takes place in a lot near Reggae Lane. Rasta-fest is a music festival celebrated in a parking lot near Shortt street. This project is asked to research these existing uses of public space and to develop strategies for expanding these temporary uses into more permanent purpose-built spaces for social gathering. How can these parking lots be developed as a network of social/spatial gathering that leverage existing community activities to create public amenities that draw from existing culture in the neighborhood.

Social Service Hubs

Identify social service organizations in the neighborhood and their potential to expand their programming and function. For example, can these sites be the location for new forms of affordable housing or might they provide programming for youth groups, assistance for seniors, food banks, or others. Students are asked to identify a series of social service hubs across the Eglinton West neighborhood. Social service hubs may include public services such as libraries, schools, or food banks. Historically in the context of Little Jamaica this has also included churches, barbers/salons, and record shops.

Housing 1: Community Land Trust (CLT)

New housing is being developed in Little Jamaica, but tends to be expensive and general employing one development model. Community Land Trusts are place-based, non-profit housing providers that offer alternatives to market based housing. Students are asked to research the operation and organization of Community Land Trusts and then to propose a development model for the neighborhood that expands this process. This will include identifying the scale of land trust buildings, potential sites, where they may be created and the relationship between them.

Housing 2: Inclusionary Zoning

Inclusionary zoning is a program that requires that a percentage of housing within new development be affordable. Currently, Eglinton West has been omitted from Toronto's inclusionary zoning plans. This project is asked to critique these plans, provide an argument for its relationship to Little Jamaica, and propose a form of housing affordability in the that expands or provides an alternative to this system.

Housing 3: Infill Single-Family Neighborhoods

Plans for new housing tend to focus on creating mid-rise or towers along the major arterial corridor in the neighborhood. As an alternative, this group is asked to explore the possibility of density in existing neighborhoods that surround the Eglinton West corridor. This project will study massing, housing types, and development strategies for small scale infill within the existing neighborhood.

Built Form / Zoning

Built form guidelines for the neighborhood have been critiqued for being overly homogenous and prescriptive. This project is asked to study existing zoning/built form guidelines, to study existing built form/morphological qualities, and to develop alternative massing strategies that draw from research of the existing site. This project will be asked to consider built form strategies that leverage existing conditions and to consider the possibility for incrementality as a conceptual framework.

Businesses – Economic Development

Commercial and retail space has long been a source of cultural creation and manifestation in Little Jamaica. Restaurants, arts studios, record shops, barbers, or salons are not only spaces of commerce but a source of cultural creation. The loss of local business in the neighborhood has been an acute problem for the neighborhood. With the construction of the LRT. This has been especially true with the closure of Black owned businesses. Local organizations are exploring mechanisms to encourage new forms of entrepreneurship and business creation, for example Commercial Community Land Trusts. This project will be asked to research existing black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica and to explore possibilities for retention, stabilization and growth.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students are asked to develop design methods that respond to conditions of social/spatial inequality. Methodologically, the course seeks to develop relationships between methods of engagement and design and to learn how physical/spatial design can complement policy and planning research.

SCHEDULE:

Project 1: Project Definition (3 weeks)

Students are asked to identify topics or practices they are interested in exploring over the semester, and to select from a list of focus sites (from above): physical social, cultural, and/or economic conditions on which they can explore and develop a design proposal. This project will consist of two parallel exercises that will merged into a single presentation. Student presentations should outline the ideas they are going to investigate and how they will study them on a site they have selected.

Project 1a: Practices and Conditions

Students are asked to prepare a presentation of urban practices and conditions they are interested in exploring. For our purposes, practices are design oriented methods that may include public space design, building typology, morphology, narrative-based research, or mapping. Students should gather historic and contemporary precedents that demonstrate these techniques. Conditions include topics, issues, or events that students are interested in engaging. These may include, but are not limited to: ecological issues such as flooding or heat island; social issues such as gentrification, economic inequality, or racial integration; or, lastly housing issues such as affordability, development practices/policies.

Project 1b: Engagement and Site Research

In parallel with project 1 the class will participate in a series of engagement exercises and site visits in Toronto's Little Jamaica neighborhood. These will include walking tours, youth engagement, and meetings with community leaders, and stakeholder discussions. During these site visits students are asked to research the project topics / focus sites listed above and to identify one or more that they will develop further research on. Students are asked to

research this topic and to develop a crucial understanding of this topic as a basis for a design project.

Deliverable: Practices / Conditions / Site

Students are asked to synthesize these two parts in order to define a design project that they will work on for the remainder of the semester. As noted by the deliverable title, this synthesis should include practices they are interested in exploring, conditions they would like to address, and a site/project and or stakeholder that they will be able to apply these toward. This may include an intersection of multiple issues and topics, or but should be located within/adjacent to a given site. Students should respond to the engagement, discussions, and visits. What particular concern or idea represented by discussion with stakeholders are students responding to. This synthesis will include a 10 minute presentation and a site collage diagram.

Project 2: Site Research/Conceptual Design Proposal (4 weeks)

Continuing from the community engagement and site visits, students are asked to identify additional sources of research. This may include attendance of or reviewing recordings of online meetings, news articles, or reports. This research should focus on a specific response to stakeholder engagement, i.e., what is the particular community interest they are serving with a prospective design proposal. Alternatively, students may explore a technical response to engagement or site visits. This may include policy research, and/or development/construction processes. From this research, students are asked to develop a conceptual design proposal for their site. This may be in the form of a model, collage, diagram, or other form of representation that articulate the site they have selected and their idea for intervening on it. This conceptual design proposal should apply ideas from precedent research to the site that has been chosen to address a condition that the student has researched.

Deliverable: Presentation of Research and Design Proposal

Students are asked to synthesize their previous research into a narrative presentation that describes conditions they are responding to, and preliminary conceptual illustration of a design proposal.

Project 3: Design Development / Drawing Delivery (5 weeks)

Students are asked to explore their design ideas through a series of assessed and assigned drawings. Include but are not limited to: 3d Aerial View, site plans/sections, axonometric, and perspectives. There will be weekly pin-ups of selected printed drawings. Final designs will be reviewed on the basis of these required drawings. Students are encouraged to develop additional drawings as needed.

Week 1

Jan 9-13

Monday

- a.m. course introduction
- **Assigned Project 1**
- p.m. group discussion of precedents and project topics

Thursday

- Group discussion of precedents and project topics

Week 2 - Jan 16-20

Monday

- a.m. Stakeholder meetings and field trip to Little Jamaica
- p.m. Group discussion of precedents and project topics

Thursday

- Desk crits: research project topics, gather articles, websites of local organizations, photos, images etc.

Week 3 - Jan 23-27

Monday

- a.m. Stakeholder meetings and field trip to Little Jamaica
- p.m. Group discussion of precedents and project topics

Thursday

- Desk crits: research project topics, gather articles, websites of local organizations, photos, images etc.

Week 4 - Jan 30-Feb3

Monday

- **Due Presentation Project 1:** project topic research, stakeholder, and site identification, and precedents.
- **Assigned Project 2:** Site research and conceptual design

Thursday

- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Week 5 - Feb 6-10

Monday

- Youth Engagement: with York Memorial Collegiate Institute
- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Thursday

- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Week 6 - Feb 13-17

Monday

- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Thursday

- **Due Interim Presentation Project 2:** Site research and conceptual design

Reading Week Feb 20-24**Week 7 - Feb 27-Mar 3**

Monday

- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Thursday

- Desk crits: Site research and conceptual design

Week 8 - Mar 6-19

Monday

- **Due Mid Review Project 1 and 2:** site research and conceptual design.
- **Assigned Project 3:** Design Development / Drawing Delivery

Thursday

- Desk Crits: Review recap and drawing schedule



Week 9 - Mar 13-17

Monday

- Pin up Drawing 1

Thursday

- Desk crits: Design Development / Drawing Delivery

Week 10 - Mar 20-24

Monday

- Pin up Drawing 1 and 2

Thursday

- Desk crits: Design Development / Drawing Delivery

Week 11 - Mar 27-31

Monday

- Pin up Drawing 1, 2, and 3

Thursday

- Desk crits: Design Development / Drawing Delivery

Week 12 - Apr 3-7**Penultimate:** Presentation and printed drawings**Week 13 - Apr 10-14**

No meetings, develop final drawings.

Final Review - Apr 21**Important Dates:**

Winter 2023	
University Re-opens	Monday, January 2, 2023
First day of S/Y Classes	Monday, January 9, 2023
Final date to add S/Y courses	Monday, January 23, 2023
Family Day (University Closed)	Monday, February 22, 2023
Reading Week – No Classes	Monday, February 20, 2023 to Friday, February 24, 2023
Last day to drop S/Y courses without academic penalty	Monday, February 27, 2023
Last day of S/Y Classes	Thursday, April 6, 2023
Good Friday (University Closed)	Friday, April 7, 2023
Make-up Monday/Study Day	Monday, April 10, 2023
Final Examination and Studio Review period	Tuesday, April 11, 2022 – Friday, April 28, 2023 (including Saturday and/or Sundays)

Conflicts with religious observances should be brought to the attention of the course instructor and the Office of the Registrar and Student Services no later than the second week of classes. For more information, please see the [Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances](#).

