Why should you take this studio?
a) It is a real world project and a collaborative experience. b) The design exploration relies on a specific urban site and topic that tackles contemporary urban problems. c) It is a living lab that embraces the future of a participatory design process, which engages with community. d) The studio’s unique teaching methodology bridges the disciplines of urban design, architecture and landscape architecture. e) Studio sponsors will provide resources for traveling to the site, model making, and for other outcomes such as prototyping, exhibition and publication.

Actual project + collaborative experience
This studio is focused on an actual grassroots demand to transform West Main Street in Peoria into a more livable and vibrant place. It also aligns with and builds upon the City’s vision of West Main as a strategically important corridor in the city and as the main axis that connects university and healthcare campuses to Downtown.
This sponsored studio is an opportunity for a collaborative experience, to design where City, University and Community meet.
We will work with the City of Peoria’s Innovation Team (i-team) to give design responses to real questions that emerge from diverse and engaged community of residents, business and property owners and anchor institutions.
This studio is a living lab, where design processes, including civic engagement, will become as important as the design product. Through this case study, the studio aims to explore strategies that tackle the broader questions of urban decline in modern American cities and the role that the design of the built environment can play in reversing that trend.
Project site + framework
The studio will focus on the West Main Street Corridor between West High Street and North University Street – a site framed by YAKU, a non-profit arts and cultural center, at one end and Bradley University Campus at the other end. This section of the street—between 400 and 1300 W Main St—acts as a threshold for neighborhoods with a diverse urban character and population, local businesses and art studios, while serving as a downtown campus for Bradley University. Several street intersections along the strip have begun to grow through investments from neighbors, community organizations, entrepreneurs and the arts community. Taking advantage of this momentum at the grassroots level, the studio will deal with some of the site’s persistent issues, such as the decrease of flow and activity from Downtown and Bradley University’s campus to the rest of the corridor, due to the perception of crime and the lack of visual points of interest, cultural amenities and retail.

Studio goals + projects
How can our projects act as catalysts for emerging vibrancy in the corridor to improve quality of place and urban life?
The goal of the studio is to reimagine a more vibrant West Main Street, by embracing the economic potential of the area, building on the history of the corridor and engaging residents in incremental community improvement.
The studio’s reflection and outcomes aim to change the perception of the place; impact the quality of life for residents, the adjacent university and healthcare community and daily visitors; and become a catalyst for further investment in the area.
We will consider site challenges, such as the empty storefronts and vacant lots, the missing teeth along the street, as potential opportunities for interventions. Punctuated or linear strategies along the corridor might engage corners, intersections and in-fill gaps in the fabric as gateways and nodes; and/or innovate in streetscape design and activate storefronts and thresholds at a human scale. Students will be asked to look for ways in which change can start to occur quickly, with tactical urbanism strategies. Through art installations, innovative urban/architectural solutions or sustainable/productive public space design, all the projects will respond to the diverse community needs and both short and long-term ‘S.M.A.R.T’ goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time Bound).
The projects will be: a) acupunctural: specific and framed in their implementation but structural in their scope—defined by students' previous conceptual plan at a larger, city scale; b) plausible: economically possible and implementable; c) incremental: approached and developed in phases that also show progress in the neighborhood.

Design process + community engagement
Traditional top-down design processes are currently being challenged. Today’s designers are called to design collectively, across fields and with people, towards a happier society and a more beautiful and sustainable environment.
When accepting the contemporary challenge of becoming mediators between the community and the administration, translators between people’s wishes and places, the designer’s role expands to orchestrate, as form givers, spatial change with social impact.
The studio will explore where architecture meets the people by engaging the diverse communities that intersect at this corridor at different stages of the design process. A whole day charrette, among other participatory dynamics throughout the semester, will be central to the studio design process. Equally important will be making the studio outcomes public by prototyping or through creative ways of sharing the final projects with the community.

**Multidisciplinary design + methodology**

At the intersection between urban design, architecture and landscape architecture, this urban studio searches for integrated design tools and responses to foster community and improve the urban environment.

Among urban-focused disciplines, there is a current debate over the future of citymaking. This studio moves away from traditional top-down, large-scale master-planning to explore other contemporary approaches, such as urban projects (hybrid in nature and acupunctural, intermediate/small in scale but not in scope) or tactical urbanism projects (aim to produce short-term action for long-term change by testing and adapting ideas on site).

Students in teams of 2 or 3 will observe & map the site (personal cartography) and listen & interact with the community (participatory workshop or Charrette) to sift & select a strategic design (project development) to be construed & constructed in-situ (prototyped, narrated or curated in an exhibition or display).

**Studio impact + outcomes**

The resultant projects of the sponsored studio will be curated and shared with the public in different formats: with an exhibition (at the street’s storefronts, vacant lots or art studios) and/or through installations, as some of the ideas may even be partially prototyped to be tested in place. The students are also expected to participate in the final outcome, a publication.

**Note** This ARCH 574 studio will require students to make between 3 and 4 trips to Peoria (TBD) to work with staff from the City of Peoria’s Innovation Team Economic Development, Community Development and Public Works departments as well as representatives from Anchor Institutions, corridor businesses and neighborhood organizations. Site visit(s) at the beginning of the semester; the charrette at week 4 or 5, and the curating/final presentation at the end. (One of the later trips may involve a Friday and a Saturday). Group travel will be sponsored by the studio.

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1 cityscape projects and projects at the building or block scale (i.e. idea incubators, art workshops, housing-work space, playgrounds, community gardens, urban furniture, parklets...)