This graduate Architecture design studio is part of a first time joint effort at the University of Illinois involving collaboration between a Landscape Architecture studio and a graduate Urban Planning workshop, an integrated design approach to develop a range of design concepts with the primary objective to support a real demand, the City of Danville's riverfront planning goals.

Project framework
The City of Danville has begun a riverfront planning with the intent of reconnecting the Vermillion River and riverfront to the adjacent downtown district as well as to surrounding residential neighborhoods. Danville grew up along its river but in recent decades that river has become less and less a part of the city's identity and the community has grown more disconnected from that riverfront. Today, the river itself is mostly inaccessible and the riverfront area, though the beauty and quality of the landscape and its recreational potential, is vastly underutilized.

The Downtown Riverfront Area, which is the portion of the riverfront this project is concentrated on, is centrally located in the community. The City of Danville and its community partners have worked diligently for more than 30 years to develop and implement a successful revitalization strategy for the Downtown area, yet the neighboring riverfront has remained disconnected from the Downtown. The public value of this cherished resource has long been recognized, but the community has struggled to find this resource due to fragmented access and a lack of thorough planning.

The goal is to establish a preferred vision for the future of the Downtown Riverfront area, an innovative and unique vision that will contribute to an improved quality of life for the Danville’s residents while acting as a catalyst for further investment in the adjacent Downtown area.

The priorities of the project include improving connectivity and the access to the riverfront, increasing park and open space land and recreational amenities for the community to utilize while also providing health and wellness benefits for the community and help reenergize the Downtown area and make that area a destination. The project should also spur additional development near the riverfront and around the downtown area and improve the image and appearance of the community.

Course description
In response, the studio will explore how to design a twenty-first century riverfront that turns around Danville’s back to face the Vermillion River. How to successfully integrate a vital mixed-use area in the threshold between downtown and river, as an accessible and active place that generates a certain urban intensity and integrates well in the landscape, that serves as a gateway to the river as well as anchors the downtown and the city to its river.

So for, the students will reflect on and enhance the landscape identity of the place and consider the urban consequences of the intervention, focusing in the relationship between design and place, designing buildings and open space, the non-figural and the figural at the same time.

The project will focus on the design of:

a) the riverfront, with engaging public buildings -housing and facilities- with activities that respond to a contemporary understanding of public space.

b) the transect between the riverside landscape and the urban environment, overcoming the infrastructural barrier and the difference of level that physically separate them and designing the riverfront as part of the new system of itineraries, recovered public spaces and infill developments in vacant lots that are being encouraged in Downtown.
The goals are to increase public accessibility to the river -through a greenway along the river and public spaces and overviews in the upper riverside- and to develop the site and the river as an environmental and recreational amenity, attracting visitors and promoting Danville’s image as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. The studio combines different disciplinary perspectives and proposes an innovative design approach bridging the plan and the project, an integration of architecture and urbanism in terms of concepts, tools and scales for designing cities. Where designing has to do with both the general and particular at the same time, with the abstraction of the plan and the architectural definition.

**Organization**

Each studio in this collaborative effort is to be taught by a professor from each discipline, and they will have different opportunities through the semester to work together. To begin with, the students will work in mixed teams through an intensive one-day ‘charrette’ in Danville, at the beginning of the semester, to brainstorm and design transversal strategies for the site, besides meeting throughout the semester once a week, every Friday, to collaborate and coordinate efforts. The interdisciplinary studio work will count with a continuous input and feedback with the City’s engaged Planning and Urban Services department, that also welcome the students to participate and assist to City Council meetings regarding downtown and riverfront topics. At the end of the semester, the final review will be hold in the City of Danville, through the media of a public exhibition of the resulting projects. A publication of the students work is also a foreseen outcome of this multidisciplinary experience.

The design process in our studio will go from the strategy -in its urban and landscape scale formulation- to the detail -at an intermediate scale- of an ‘urban architecture’. For the first 3 weeks we will focus on the urban and landscape conditions of the site and the students –in teams- will analyze the site through a ‘personal cartography’, to continue designing, until mid-term, on the ‘master plan’ and general layout of a ‘mixed-use riverfront project’. For the rest of the semester, the teams will work on the completion of the project, at an intermediate scale, to then lead to a more precise basic architectural definition of built public facilities proposed by each team and to the urban design definition of the open space that results from the overall strategy. At the end, individually, each student will further develop and illustrate, at a ‘human scale’, one or two special ‘moments’ of the common proposal to reconnect the river with its city and to help activate the community.

**Course content**

- **personal cartography** _to look and map: data + morphological, material and atmospheric features of the site_
- **master plan** _to sift and select: activity+perceptual study of the built and open space_
- **urban project** _to construe and construct:_
  - designing the architecture at an intermediate scale: public facilities (including public housing)
  - designing the urban space ground level: open public space+building’s ground floors

**Course goals**

- to promote sensitivity to the urban and landscape dimensions of architecture
- to highlight the social background and find meaning in architecture
- to integrate a basic understanding of urbanism and landscape into the design methodology
- to develop a coherent structure of theoretical concepts, a critical capacity to diagnose problems and solutions and a professional culture in the managing of techniques/tools
- to explore designing methods at a wide range of scales