Ecological Urbanism
STUDIO BRIEF With increasing concern over the dwindling diversity of natural species, the federal government is establishing five institutes to study the effects of climate change on the biosphere. Since Lake Michigan exists within a natural confluence of many diverse ecological resources, Chicago has been selected to host one of these institutes. The university will be partnering other local institutions, as well as private research groups, to create this multi-disciplinary campus.

Although the primary efforts will be scientific research, significant resources will also be devoted to higher-level education and public outreach. Because the scientists come from not only multiple departments – geology, marine biology, physics, zoology, chemistry, botany, among others – but also from multiple institutions, the research center will focus on collective dialogue as well as classrooms and lab space. The institute will provide onsite housing for graduate students as well as visiting scholars. Since this is a concerted national research and educational effort that dovetails with similar international efforts, there will be a full schedule of visiting scientists and lecturers.

The objective of the studio, therefore, is to plan and design a new campus for the study of environmental biology. The Institute of Environmental Biology is sited on Northerly Island on the former Meig’s Field, within a delicate ecosystem. The challenge will be to balance the competing requirements between nature, urbanism and emerging typologies. At the same time, the institute will serve as a test bed to try out new design logics and alternative transportation models, for example, the autonomous Google car within a clean slate scenario.

The semester will be divided into three components: [1] Biomimetic Research + Analysis, [2] Development of Campus Infrastructural System, [3] Architectural Design with emphasis on Student Center. Both individual and teamwork will be required. Over the course of the semester, guest lecturers and rhino software tutorials will advance the design objectives of the studio. A site visit to Chicago and a field trip to MIT Sensable Cities Lab and/or other research campus are planned.