

holdings_



holding envelope, made with DALL-E, 2023.

COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor: strat coffman, stratt@umich.edu (they/them)
Meeting times: Monday, Thursday, 1pm - 6pm
Location: In-person, 3100 A&AB
Office hours: Tuesday, 10am - 11am
Google classroom: gxtufnn

COURSE DESCRIPTION

"A leaf a gourd a shell a net a bag a sling a sack a bottle a pot a box a container. A holder. A recipient."

As Ursula K. Le Guin famously pointed out, we have tended to overlook the life-giving role of "the thing to put things in" in favor of the life-ending pierce of the spear. Despite the attention we give to acts of force, so much of what we do as a species, and maybe our existence itself, is made possible by a supporting cast of technologies for holding, like cups, blankets, dumpsters, 18-wheelers. Buildings are big ones (but smaller than others, like landfill linings or the ozone). Architecture is like a meta-bag, containing other smaller bags holding together multiplicities of items, media, and lifeforms. The design of these extra-large bags makes room for certain things, and certain ways of living, over others (100 bodies may fit, but not 1000). Enmeshed in the containment of physical things is the psychic relation of being held. The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott used the term holding environment to elaborate the relational space between mother–infant and therapist–client, one that allows multiple contradicting truths to be held at once. What would be an architecture that has the capacity to hold complexity and contradiction for its patrons?

In the origin stories the discipline has told itself, the enclosing of social life, what we now call architecture, occurred through the joining of various craft traditions—ceramics, carpentry, masonry, and weaving. Textiles wrapped over rigid frames to create, in effect, oversized vessels for humans and their baggage, physical and psychic. This conception of envelope as a secondary system laid over the primary and preexisting structural one was transmuted and entrenched

through the dominant practices of modernist architecture (eg. curtains walls). Le Corbusier's "Five Points of Architecture" applied so much pressure to the wrapper that it almost disappeared—an impossibly thin glassy gauze hovering at the knife edge of the open plan. Subsequent paradigms infused the wrapper with other talents, but continued to appeal to its immaterial or symbolic effects—as a billboard of pastiche (postmodernism) or a projection of branding value (developer architecture). Throughout these regurgitations, the holder has remained spliced off from 'structure,' 'frame,' 'support'—dissociated from its own capacities.

This studio will mine the politics of enclosure, engaging feminist philosophies of containers, psychoanalytic theories of holding, and architectural stories about envelopes. The studio will approach the envelope as a thickened site of activity that extends beyond the exposed surface to include labor of maintenance and care, protocols of handling, and the residue of memory. When diverted from the functionalist program of modernism or the marketing agendas of capitalist development, what other roles can the container take on, or be found to already possess? Working iteratively between container and contents, students will develop their own critical position on envelopes, holding, and being held. The studio will begin with three quick exercises that unfold different material and conceptual approaches to containers. We will consider how a bag might act on its contents, changing its status, state, or value. Using emergent harvesting technologies, like photogrammetry and AI-assisted imaging, students will bring together their preliminary holding models to develop hybrid building-bags, through the design of containing entities—museums, storehouses, storage units, stockpiles, gathering halls, therapeutic clinics. Each student will consider what deserves to be held, and what kind of embrace is appropriate for the contents held.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The studio will begin with three brief exercises, each unfolding a different take on holding. In the remainder of the studio, you will integrate these different approaches into a hybrid building-scale container proposition.

Dressing 2 weeks 20%

Consider the associations, vibes, and affects that things carry. Gather everyday objects with different characters and personalities and craft containers that hold them together, materializing and amplifying their differences. Dressing can be an act of obscuring, which in turn may reveal some latent or overlooked quality of the things held. Or a way of resurfacing things to invest them with some value or rarity that testifies to the meaning they hold for you.

Setting 2 weeks 20%

Consider the poetic behavior of structural logics, how one component may lift or suspend another or how a system may bend or buckle when loaded with weight. Working with basic building materials, design a structural module whose performance or load diagram is transformed when loaded with the weight of some contents. Perhaps a live or dead load holds the otherwise precarious system together. Maybe the addition of weight leads to non-plastic failure that elicits new forms. Maybe the buckling creates cavities in the material that open up other uses. It may change the proportions of underlying spaces.

Archiving 2 weeks 20%

Consider the labor of caring for contents. Identify a collection of material that is not held, and that you feel deserves to be held—this will be your counter-archive. This could be material not easily cataloged due to its ephemerality, like rap battles or family recipes, or material excluded from major institutional holdings like museum or library archives. Draft a series of architectural documents that detail the methods of collecting, ordering, storing, accessing, circulating, and displaying the counter-archive.

A threeway holding 6 weeks 30%

Combine your work from the first three exercises into a hybrid building proposition.

Readings and discussion participation

10%

Several times throughout the semester, we will convene to discuss readings and other materials that will help us inform and critically reframe the design work. Active reading is crucial. Read with some kind of marking device, underline, jot down notes in the margins, note confusing or illuminating passages, come to class with questions and references. You are not expected to fully understand the material we encounter. We will work toward understanding together, as a collective exercise.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To develop a position on the architectural envelope that challenges traditional notions of enclosure. Students will consider architecture's capacity to hold in an expanded sense that is sensitive to less tangible dimensions of a building's contents, such as memory, affect, identity, and well-being.
- To provide new ways of developing design ideas that respond to complexity and allow for difference.
- To create a studio culture based on openness, collaboration, mutual respect of others' differences and ideas, and shared discourse.
- To support a collective framework of inquiry and experimentation within which students can take risks, assert individual design interests, and follow through on their ambitions.

EVALUATION

Deadlines must be met for the successful completion of the course. Group work will be evaluated collectively. I will take your commitment, effort, originality, participation and improvement in this course into account when it comes to determining final grades. Final grades will be determined after the submittal of student documentation of completed work and are not negotiable. Grades for the course are based upon (+/- where appropriate):

- A | Excellent work — Project surpasses expectations in terms of originality, conceptual rigor and craft. Work is complete in all regards.
- B | Good work — Project is thorough, well represented, diligently pursued, and work is complete in all regards.
- C | Required work — Project meets the minimum requirements but lacks rigor, originality.
- D | Poor work — Project contribution is insufficient. Level-appropriate skills are lacking and work is incomplete in one or more regards.
- F | Unacceptable work — Project contribution is unacceptable and very incomplete or student exceeds three unexcused absences.
- X | Excused Incomplete — Due to medical or family emergency, after consultation with the Associate Deans' office, a new completion date is assigned.

COURSE SOFTWARE + RESOURCES

- Rhino
- [Midjourney](#) [subscription to be provided]
- [Polycam](#) [subscription to be provided]
- [Source Material](#): Taubman College's ongoing resource for software & hardware tutorials.
- [U of M's Generative AI Resources](#), and in particular, their bit about Prompt Literacy.

CLASS COMMUNICATION

We'll use [Google Classroom](#) as our primary hub for sharing and disseminating materials. I can be reached by email (stratt@umich.edu) and I'll attempt to respond in a timely manner, but be aware that during evenings and weekends

I'll be slower to respond. Meeting during office hours is best for general questions about the course, talking about your project/coursework, or discussing anything personal.

SCHEDULE

TH 09/14	Faculty presentation
TH 10/12	Review Exercises 01-03
TH 10/19	Skills workshare AI imaging + photogrammetry
TH 11/30	Review Exercise 04
TH TBD	Review All work [+ potential Exercise 05]

COURSE CLIMATE + COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

The success of this studio course depends upon engaged interaction between all of us and the majority of our class time will be spent in discussion as we present and critique work, form questions, and endeavor to learn from each other. Participation – in the form of both active speaking *and* listening – is necessary. We acknowledge that for some, listening comes more easily than speaking, and vice versa. We will ask you to pay attention to your comfort level and to make efforts to both make space for all voices and to challenge yourself to participate as much as possible. We will try to structure our class meetings in ways that provide diverse opportunities for engagement. The goal is to engage all kinds of learners.

This is a reminder to all of us to work together to actively construct and maintain the studio and classroom as spaces of mutual respect and safe spaces: “A place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of [sex](#), [race/ethnicity](#), [sexual orientation](#), [gender identity](#) or [expression](#), [cultural background](#), age, or [physical](#) or [mental ability](#); a place where the rules guard each person's [self-respect](#) and [dignity](#) and strongly encourage everyone to [respect](#) others.” ([Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit](#), pg. 67)

Our Community Guidelines, adapted from [The Program On Intergroup Relations](#) and [CRLT's Guidelines for Classroom Interactions](#), are:

- [Be present and engaged](#): avoid technology distractions. In order for people to share vulnerably and bravely, they must feel that the other participants are also invested in the dialogue. It is important that all participants commit to being present, stay engaged, and avoid using electronic devices or checking out of the dialogue in other visible ways.
- [Share airtime](#). In dialogue it can be easy for those participants who feel most comfortable speaking up in large groups to dominate the conversation and for those who are more introverted to stay quiet. However, in order for everyone to grow and learn, it is important to balance who is sharing. If you tend to have a lot to say, make sure you leave sufficient space to hear from others. If you tend to stay quiet in group discussions, challenge yourself to contribute so others can learn from you.
- [Don't suppress voices](#). Don't suppress marginal or unpopular voices. Civility does not mean lack of dissent.
- [Listen to learn, not to respond](#): listen harder when you disagree. Unlike typical discussions where people often focus primarily on what they are planning to say next, in dialogue we invite people to listen generously

with the intent to understand rather than to interject. Participants should listen even harder when someone is saying something about which they disagree to try to understand their perspective.

- Take the learning, leave the stories. We hope that participants take what they learn in dialogue and apply it to the rest of their lives. At the same time participants also need to be able to trust that they can be vulnerable and that the stories they share will not be repeated outside of the group. We specifically do not promise confidentiality because we cannot guarantee it, but we believe the underlying concept of confidentiality is maintained by asking people not to repeat others' stories without permission.
- Take pair work or small group work seriously. Remember that your peers' learning is partly dependent upon your engagement.
- Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems. If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.

STUDENT WELL-BEING

Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers many resources, some of which are listed at [Resources for Student Well-being](#) on the Well-being for U-M Students website. You can also search for additional resources on that website.

Taubman College is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. Studies and surveys indicate clearly that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impact student academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, please reach out to any of the following for assistance:

- Karen Henry is a CAPS Embedded Psychologist who offers counseling here at Taubman College (karhenry@umich.edu).
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can be reached at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays. For medications, contact University Health Services (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs>, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.
- For an extensive listing of mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.
- To get help right away, if you or someone you know is in a crisis situation, please do one of the following: Call 911 or Call (734) 996-4747 (U-M Hospital Psychiatric Emergency).

DIVERSITY

Taubman College affirms the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as we organize resources and priorities that align with our values. We seek to have a diverse group of persons at all levels of the college — students, faculty, staff and administrators — including persons of different race and ethnicity, national origin, gender and gender expression, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religious commitment, age, and disability status. We strive to create a community of mutual respect and trust, a community in which all members and their respective backgrounds, identities, and views are represented without any threat of bias, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination. The [College Compact](#) is a description of the environment we wish to create and the behaviors we hope our community members will exhibit.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS + DISABILITY

Disability is an integral part of diversity and I am committed to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. If you think you need accommodation for a disability, please inform the instructor. Some aspects of this course — including assignments, and in-class activities — may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. We will work with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) to determine appropriate academic accommodations. We will treat any information you provide as private and confidential.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Work is expected to be completed in studio. Three unexcused absences can result in a lowering of one full letter grade. Three occurrences of lateness of more than 5 minutes will count as one unexcused absence. Advanced written notice is required for the granting of an excused absence. Medical and family emergencies must be notified to the instructor, and the observation of religious holidays is permitted.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to participate in class discussion and activities, in addition to completing assignments and readings before each class. Remember that your voice and experience is valuable to the discussion, so please speak your mind. Mistakes are encouraged and confusion is part of the process. No one is an expert—do not be afraid to ask questions and speak your mind. During class, pose a question, respond to a peer, to the reading, or integrate an experience or object with the discussion.