



# Architecture (ARCH) 653

## Contemporary Architectural Theory and Research (Revision 1)

<b>Status:</b>	Replaced with new revision, see the <a href="#">course listing</a>  for the current revision 
<b>Delivery mode:</b>	<a href="#">Individualized study online</a>  . Delivered via Brightspace.
<b>Credits:</b>	3
<b>Area of study:</b>	Architecture
<b>Prerequisite:</b>	Enrolment in the Graduate Diploma - Architecture program or referral from the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB) for individuals with a professional degree in architecture from a university outside Canada.
<b>Precluded:</b>	<a href="#">ARCH 420</a> 
<b>Faculty:</b>	<a href="#">Faculty of Science and Technology</a> 
<b>Notes:</b>	For students interested in pursuing a career as a registered architect, this course contributes to the <a href="#">RAIC Syllabus Diploma</a>  .

Credit may be transferred for previous work considered equivalent.

## Overview

Architecture 653: Contemporary Architectural Theory and Research examines contemporary architectural theory and practice from the late 1960s to the present. A number of issues and values will be explored through theoretical essays, critical writings and lecture presentations that expose the diversity of contemporary architectural thought and practices.

The first part of the course explores opposing positions and values that coexist within various time frames in both local and global contexts. Course learning activities and assignments are designed to help you understand the theoretical underpinnings that inform and/or explain architectural practices. The ability to apply this knowledge in articulating an architectural proposal with clear personal positioning is essential for students entering graduate level studies.

## Outline

- Unit 1: Research
- Unit 2: Critique of Modernism
- Unit 3: The Rise of Post-modern Theory 1969–1979
- Unit 4: Pluralism of Thought – The 1980s
- Unit 5: Millennial Excursions – 1990s and Beyond
- Unit 6: The Research Project and Thesis Preparation

## Learning outcomes

Throughout this course (and beyond), you will be called upon to observe the built environment around you. The built fabric of your city or town is composed of buildings and spaces produced over a long period of time. When you look at

contemporary architecture, that which was built beyond the 1960s, what differentiates it from architecture of the past?

What are the ideas and values embodied in architecture of a past period that make it still valuable today in your community? What are the ideas and values underlying what we are building today that will ensure significance and relevance fifty years from now?

As you move through the course readings and videos you will be confronted with a dazzling array of ideas and thoughts about contemporary architecture, made all the more difficult to sort out without the distillation and clarity that occurs with the passage of time. As you look at contemporary architecture, ask yourself where you stand relative to those ideas as you perceive them. How would you approach the different design problems if you had been given the mandate?

You will have to formulate a problem of your choice, a design or technical issue that would sustain your interest and could be relevant for the community around you, in order to develop a research proposal at the end of the course. While the subject might change later on, it's the thinking process that you will develop throughout the course that will guide you in formulating and situating the project. Make it a reflection of you, your values, and your ideals!

## Evaluation

To **receive credit**  for ARCH 653, you must achieve a minimum composite course grade of **C+ (67 percent)**  or greater.

The chart below indicates the assignments for credit and their weighting toward your final grade:

Activity	Weight
Assignment 1: Research journal framework and Unit 1 responses	10%
Assignment 2: Reading notes for Units 2–5 inclusive	10%
Assignment 3a: Journal evaluation at Units 2 and 3	10%
Assignment 3b: Journal evaluation at Units 4 and 5	10%

Activity	Weight
Assignment 4: Fiches for Units 2 to 5	20%
Assignment 5: Project proposal	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Materials

### Digital course materials

Links to the following course materials will be made available in the course:

Mallgrave, H. F., & Goodman, D. (2011). *An introduction to architectural theory: 1968 to the present*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Borden, I., & Rüedi Ray, K. (2014). *The dissertation: An architecture student's handbook* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Ott, E. (2011). *Decoding theoryspeak: An illustrated guide to architectural theory*. Routledge.

### Physical course materials

The following course materials are included in a course package that will be shipped to your home prior to your course's start date:

Mallgrave, H. F., & Contandriopoulos, C. (Eds.). (2008). *Architectural theory: Volume II: An anthology from 1871–2005*. Blackwell.

## Important links

- › [RAIC Centre for Architecture](#) 
- › [Graduate Diploma in Architecture](#) 
- › [Courses](#) 

> **Fees and Funding** [↗](#)

Athabasca University reserves the right to amend course outlines occasionally and without notice. Courses offered by other delivery modes may vary from their individualized study counterparts.

*Opened in Revision 1, July 15, 2025*

*Updated March 9, 2026*

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