

# On The Job Training – Almost

*Architecture professor brings the pros into the classroom*

**Taking lecture notes** or reading a textbook are standard operating procedure in most college classrooms.

It's safe to say, then, that Abbas Aminmansour's architecture course on integrated design and construction of buildings is something different.

from an initial limit of 35 students to 50.

"To have more than 50 architecture graduate students wanting to take an elective course says something about [its] quality," Aminmansour said. "I personally feel very privileged to have been a part of this."

The unpaid guest lecturers travel to the University on a voluntary basis from all over the country to cover every realm of the architectural world. From initial design development to construction and everything in between, Aminmansour's students absorb the multiple phases that go into various-sized building projects.

Aminmansour also invites lawyers, leasing management pros and site experts knowledgeable in historic renovation. In all, more than 40 experts dispense a plethora of information each semester.

"[Our class discussions involve] high-profile, complex, very interesting issues," said Kelly Saunders, a lawyer in the class seeking a career change. "Within each lecture, with each phase, we get the different issues that would come up in each area."

Aminmansour views the class as a win-win situation for everyone involved. The students get a tremendous education, while visiting firms get to highlight their projects. Some companies have even hired Aminmansour's students.

"Overall, it's a service to the profession," he said of the course. "The graduating students come in to their

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jobs more prepared and can immediately be more productive."

In November, the class visited the construction sites of the Blackstone Hotel and Trump International Hotel & Tower in Chicago. The field trip gave students an opportunity to don hard hats and protective eyewear and witness ongoing projects firsthand.

Of particular interest to **Steve Freiburg**, MUP '90 FAA, was the restoration of the terra cotta material within the Blackstone, as well as its historic suites on the 10th floor, where several U.S. presidents have stayed.

"You see how they built things several years ago and what it takes to renovate them to today's code standards," he said.

In contrast, students also visited the brand-new Trump Tower, whose concrete, rather than steel, frame is unique. Freiburg said the contrast between the two projects – one being the renovation of a classic building, the other a modern, flashy skyscraper – was notable. "You get to see the two extremes," he said.

Though integrated design and technology is his specialty, Aminmansour said even he continues to learn from the guest speakers.

"Every project is different and has its own characteristics, problems and solutions," he said. "There's a lot to learn; you'll never learn enough."

But Aminmansour's students, it appears, are getting a fantastic head start.

– Sal Nudo



Aminmansour

UI News Bureau/L. Brian Stauffer Photo

The professor recruits some of the world's foremost experts in the field of architecture to speak in front of his class – developers, architects, structural and mechanical engineers and contractors all visit to discuss the high level of collaboration that goes into a typical architecture project.

"If you can bring in a touch of the real world to the classroom, bring in people who practice engineering on a daily basis, or architecture on a daily basis, then you can give students a heads-up for the future," Aminmansour said.

Since its inception in the spring of 2003, the graduate-level course designed by Aminmansour and the School of Architecture's Tang Committee (made up of UI alumni) has been a hit – so much so that enrollment has expanded