

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Town+Gown?

Town+Gown is a systemic action research program that aims at increasing evidence-based analysis, information transfer and understanding of the City's Built Environment. The City's built environment serves as an ideal laboratory for those working in the City's physical spaces and in the Built Environment disciplines.

Town+Gown functions like a *gear shift*, linking academics and practitioners on projects, with practitioners working on projects as equal partners with the academic partners.



As Town+Gown moves through each academic year or action-learning cycle of research-reflection-action, it also functions like a *wheel, with spokes*, linking researchers and practitioners over time to facilitate practice and policy changes based on research.

Why was Town+Gown created?

As unresolved built environment issues become more apparent there has been an increased need for additional research activities in the built environment.

Town+Gown pragmatic and integrated response to this need scales long-standing structural hurdles that have made increasing built environment research difficult over the years.

These include low levels of investment, low levels of public sponsorship, inadequate linkages between research and application, and the fragmented nature of construction industry, which is mirrored by the traditional research methodology that also suffers from tendency to become fractured.

How does Town+Gown work?

Town+Gown facilitates partnerships between academics and practitioners on Built Environment research projects (the Research), generating discussion and follow-up research (the Reflection) aimed at making changes in practices and policies (the Action).

The Research. The Research Agenda is the key tool to move this systemic action system program along. Before each academic year, Town+Gown works with participants to develop a City-wide Built Environment Research Agenda, which is distributed to all participants and available for download on <http://webdev02.ddc.nycnet/sandbox/html/design/tg.shtml>. The questions are expressed broadly to form an umbrella research concept under which the schools and the practitioner partners can work together to craft more defined projects. Town+Gown supports the academic-practitioner collaborations during the academic year.

The Reflection. Town+Gown disseminates research results and fosters on-going discussions. The annual review, *Building Ideas*, abstracts the project reports, which are available to Town+Gown members. Town+Gown also organizes collaborative symposia and other events, bringing academics and practitioners together to focus on the results of research.

The Action. At this point in Town+Gown's life, most research projects lead to follow-up research that will support future changes in practices and policies.

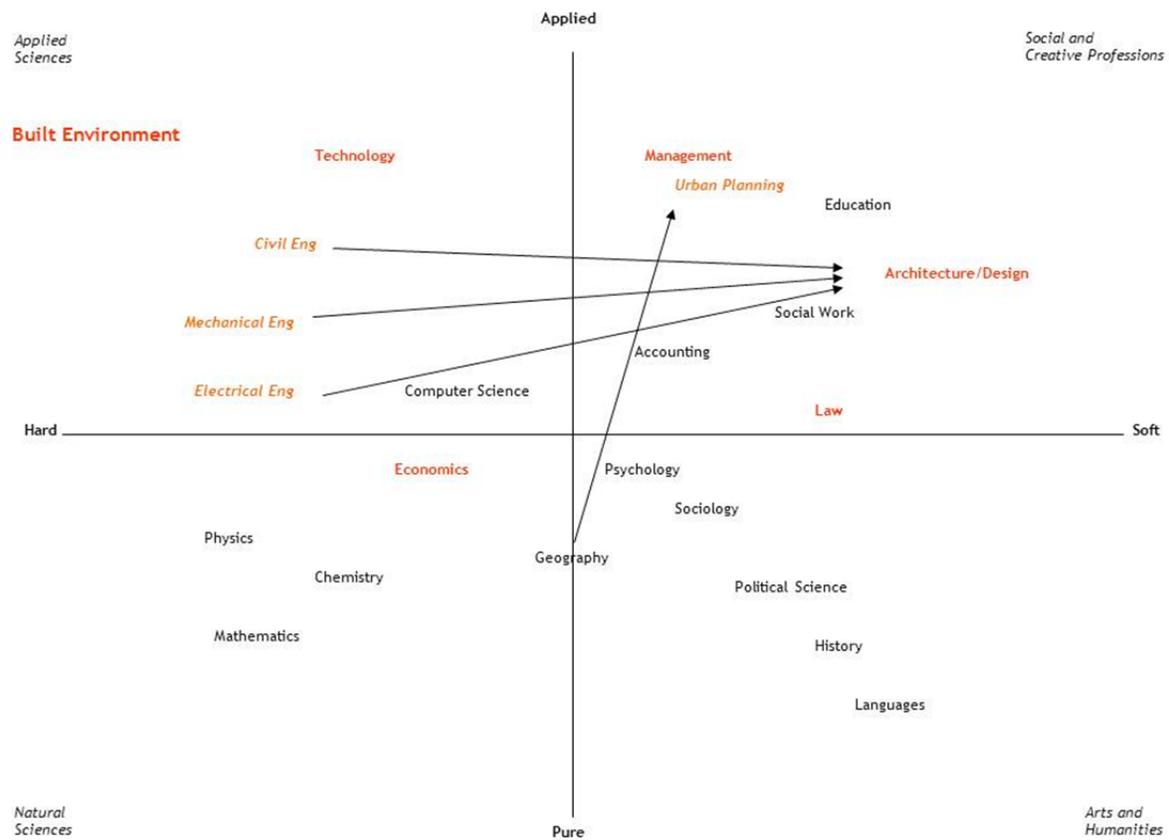
Who participates in Town+Gown?

Town+Gown is open to all who wish to participate:

- The first group, Gown, consists of academic institutions with departments and graduate programs in fields that overlap with Built Environment disciplines.
- The second group, Town, consists of built environment practitioners. Within Town, there is one subgroup consisting of public owners and another consisting of other practitioners, interested in supporting projects.
- The third group, Advisory, consists of practitioners who wish to be updated periodically about the program but not actively participate.

What does "Built Environment" mean?

The *Built Environment* is a recognized multi-disciplinary field consisting of five disciplines—Management, Economics, Law, Technology and Design. These disciplines are plotted on a matrix, with the horizontal axis representing "a continuum from 'hard' (paradigmatic) to 'soft' (non-paradigmatic)" disciplines, and the vertical axis representing a continuum from the applied disciplines to the pure disciplines. Town+Gown has modified the original expression of the core disciplines to make them more suitable for the program, adding Geography to encompass the urban planning field and adding the engineering disciplines as key components of Design, as indicated in the chart below:



Big/An Disciplinary Model from Chynoweth, Paul, The Built Environment Interdiscipline: A Theoretical Model for Decision Makers in Research and Teaching, Proceedings of the CIB Working Commission (W089) Building Education and Research Conference, Kowloon Sangri-La Hotel, Hong Kong, April 10-13, 2006.

What does “systemic action research” mean?

Systemic action research is a type of cooperative inquiry involving both practitioner and academic as equal partners in knowledge creation. It accepts multiple modes of inquiry and analysis to generate research results, the purposes of which support changes in practices and policies via a collaborative feedback process.

Systemic action research is appropriate for complex and dynamic social systems, like the built environment, where issues require the relevant context in order for participants to understand and analyze them. Conducted via an open process, with multiple perspectives and research methodologies, systemic action research activity becomes a broad iterative feedback process consisting of research, reflection and action, termed “action learning sets.” Action learning sets, repeated over time within a systemic action community, can provide the necessary evidence-based research to move the complex social system along.

What can Town+Gown do for members of Town?

Develops a coherent and comprehensive Built Environment research agenda with your relevant questions

Wide dissemination of Research Agenda gets your research questions in front of all participating schools, increasing the chances that applied research will result

Provides continuity for large issues, so that one project can lead to various follow-up projects over time

Identifies cross-agency and multi-disciplinary issues so that more than one school can work on pieces of same question

Bridges academic/practitioner divide for research questions picked up by the service learning programs as well funded research with as professors and Ph.D. students

Makes contacts and manages relationships with academic programs, faculty advisors and student teams from project inception to "peer" review

Academic consortium contract currently under development for Built Environment research will available to all public owner members of Town

Publishes *Building Ideas* annually, abstracting students' work, presenting the results of all projects and making the final reports available to members of Town+Gown

Sponsors collaborative discussion events for "real time" consideration of completed work among Town+Gown members as foundation for possible changes to practices and policies

What can Town+Gown do for members of Gown?

Provides a comprehensive and coherent City-wide research agenda with real and relevant questions for use by:

Experiential/service learning programs in developing capstone projects, workshops, studios and internships

Professors to develop courses around, use as case-studies and/or work on/propose academic research projects

Bridges academic/practitioner divide for your in-service learning programs as well as professors

Makes introductions and helps manage relationships with practitioner partners from project inception to "peer" review

Collaborative discussion events with Town+Gown members provide opportunities for academics to engage with public policy makers on place- and data-based inquiries and analyses, providing opportunities for future work

Increases exposure of applied academic work product among practitioners

Publishes annual *Building Ideas* reviewing, presenting your program and students' work to a wider audience of built environment practitioners