History/theory seminars play a significant role in design education. Whereas design studios allow students to solve problems and engage in creative expression, these seminars offer students the opportunity to delve deeper into selected topics and reflect on the ideas and values that guide their approaches to design. Yet, the traditional seminar format, which typically consists of readings, lecture presentations, and group discussions, does not account for the particular needs of design students. Rather than adopting this established format, design educators have the opportunity to leverage the specific skillsets of their target audience to provide a more active experience for the students and to generate more productive outcomes for their own research. This paper highlights a seminar focused on architectural conceptions of ground that integrates a series of modeling workshops in which students engage with course themes through the activity of making. This seminar, “Groundforms,” is structured around five specific ground typologies—slabs, negatives, piles, rocks, and platforms—which each have a corresponding lecture, reading, and modeling workshop. While the lectures and readings introduce students to relevant themes within existing discourse, the modeling workshops allow students to use design as a medium for theoretical exploration. From a pedagogical standpoint, the instructions for the modeling workshops are intended to provide a loose set of rules to guide production, but not a prescriptive recipe or an intended result. Thus, the students gained a deeper understanding of the characteristics for each typology by exploring the range of possibilities within the established...
parameters. Moreover, this workshop format delivered productive outcomes for my own research interests as the students created typological variations that I had not anticipated. By importing the students’ design skillsets into the seminar classroom, this course fosters a symbiotic relationship between teaching and research that is valuable for the students and instructor alike.

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