PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN

Summer Program: 2013

Lead Instructors
Steven Moore
Coleman Coker

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Summer Program: 2013

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CONTENTS
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This summer program would not have been possible without the support of the Office of the Provost, The University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture, and the Center for Sustainable Development. The following people and organizations also made generous contributions:

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INTRODUCTION
Public Interest Design (PID) is an emergent movement of citizens, professionals, students, and academics that reflects a public appetite for community needs unmet by conventional design practice. PID is rooted in the ethical responsibility to design for social and material change. The field is shaping a new mode of design practice by engaging under-served communities in the design process. Since 2011, the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD) at the University of Texas at Austin has collaborated with diverse partners to create the annual summer PID program, which supports the cultivation of a new set of practices within the realm of architecture education. Each year, the PID program has become more robust, more rigorous, and more impactful for communities. Each year, the program has empowered more student leaders for fulfilling careers in public design, while strengthening the network of public interest design professionals.

The summer 2013 PID program proved to be the most ambitious year yet. As a kickoff event, the five-day, inaugural Design Futures Public Interest Design Student Leadership Forum convened 43 student leaders and 27 professional PID leaders from across the country to explore the emergence of PID in history, its philosophical roots, and contemporary challenges around practicing PID. The forum included presentations by leaders reflecting the diversity of the PID field, hands-on workshops, and a student design challenge competition. Many of the forum’s student leaders joined other students to participate in two summer sessions of PID coursework, including:

- **Advanced PID Design/Build Studio** (1st and 2nd summer sessions)
- **PID Research Seminar** (1st summer session)
- **PID Summer Externship** (2nd summer session)

Through these courses, students explored the intersection between service, social needs, ecological priorities, and the production of the built environment. Each course provided students with theoretical foundations and opportunities to put principles into practice.

Coleman Coker of the University of Texas School of Architecture led the **Design/Build Studio**, through which students designed and implemented interventions to build on the strengths of the emergent East Austin Boggy Creek Hike and Bike trail and expand its potential to deliver the highest environmental, recreational, and health quality while also honoring the natural and cultural traditions of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Steven Moore of the University of Texas School of Architecture and John Peterson of Public Architecture led the **PID Research Seminar** and **Summer Externship**. These courses empowered students with a toolbox of qualitative and quantitative methods for engaging communities and conducting post-occupancy evaluations (POE) of public interest design projects. In the Research
Seminar, students studied theories and methods of post-occupancy evaluation, and applied them through mini-assessments of previous PID summer projects, and the development of POE research proposals. Many students then carried out this research during the Externship.

Rather than a closed document, the intent of this report is to highlight how a set of practices developed within a larger PID continuum were applied in Austin, Texas. It is thus a platform “in the making” that assimilates lessons learned from the summer program and charts future steps in new directions.

The relevance of the 2013 PID program is three-fold. First, it offered a historical and theoretical backdrop to PID actions. Second, it served as a practical bridge between students and professionals around the common causes of service in under served communities. Third, it provided students interested in PID with a venue to connect with other like-minded students across the nation and world.
Introduction

East Austin has had an active history of environmental justice challenges that have prompted local responses. Issues range from the relocation of a heavily polluting BFI recycling plant to concern over the close proximity of local schools to factories using potentially harmful chemicals. Underlying these environmental justice issues is a historically established division between East and West Austin. Peaking with the systemic relocation of ethnic minorities to East Austin in the late 1920s, it is widely acknowledged that these actions ultimately heralded a racial and economic division, which is still present today in city parks and infrastructure. All things considered, there remains a long way to go in order for East Austin to offer the same quality of trails and creek edges that more affluent parts of the community enjoy.

To remedy a bit of this discrepancy, the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) recently undertook a series of renovations along parts of the Boggy Creek Greenbelt, in Boggy Creek and Rosewood Parks. These efforts include restoring channel stability, developing greener edges, establishing riparian zones and improving user access through trail extensions, all to make the park a more desirable destination.

Project Description

Through creative and strategic design/build interventions along the trail system that parallels Boggy Creek, students helped transform the emergent East Austin Boggy Creek Hike and Bike trail into a public amenity that boasts both the highest environmental and recreational quality, while celebrating local traditions. Employing a strengths-based approach to assessment and engagement, students worked to build on the environmental and cultural assets and capacities that were already there. Through thoughtful site assessment and community engagement, students identified opportunities to help make open spaces more accessible and desirable for all community members, especially young children, senior citizens, and pedestrians. In doing so, students helped to facilitate an enhanced opportunity for those in East Austin to lead healthier lifestyles, while gaining a greater appreciation of the natural amenities right at their doorstep. Targeted at Austinites most in need, the transformation of this public space promises to be a stepping stone to a stronger, healthy, and more sustainable community.

Student work is built along a one-and-one-half-mile stretch of the hike and bike trail. The north
most location is just east of the MLK light rail stop. This area is adjacent to a space now being developed into a community garden and is where the City is planning a major trail extension. Student interventions extend south from there following the trail’s path to the Boggy Creek Park and to the trail’s end at Parque Zaragosa.

**Environmental Stewardship**

Student work incorporates sustainable design elements and features informational images and text, serving as both passive and active educational devices. In featuring these ‘teaching-tools’, the importance of riparian zones and urban watersheds is highlighted, drawing attention to the importance of respecting the value of urban waterways and outlining methods to actively protect them.

The use of reclaimed materials and thoughtful design demonstrates and promotes sustainable practices. The design/build projects employ as much recycled material as possible, and any new materials were sought out within a 200 mile radius of the city to cut down on long-haul transportation and associated increased carbon footprint. Students were tasked with including “green” components and employing other educational devices that highlight environmental stewardship.

**Strengthening Community Identity and Ownership**

As part of community outreach, students focused on the youth and seniors of East Austin. To accomplish this, they worked with and mentored high school students taking part in a summer architecture program through a local non-profit organization in Austin. They also worked with middle school students who actively participated in parts of the design/build work through an urban art project. Students also engaged senior citizens from the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center located in Boggy Creek Park.

It goes without saying that a park should embody a unique neighborhood identity. As an extension of adjacent neighborhoods, parks should serve as a testament to the distinct culture and populace surrounding them. The social value of parks resides in providing an outlet for neighborhood interaction and recreation. Well-designed infrastructural additions have the potential to amplify a sense of local inter connectivity. Working side-by-side with the younger generation on an art project gave the PID students a greater sense of community ownership, not to mention transforming their work into a more poignant manifestation of neighborhood creativity and values. Conversing with senior citizens who had grown up in the area and have seen its transformation provided a deeper understanding of the local culture and history.

**Student Outcomes**

Through this course, students expanded their capacity for social and ecological regenerative site assessment and community engagement methodologies, developed technical and practical knowledge of sustainable design techniques and materials, and expanded their capacity to express and transfer values of stewardship through their design.
Coleman Coker

Coleman Coker, RA, is principal of buildingstudio and the Ruth Carter Stevenson Regents Chair in the Art of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. Coker was awarded the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and is a Loeb Fellow in Advanced Environmental Studies at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. He holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Memphis College of Art and received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from there.

Coker founded buildingstudio in 1999 after a thirteen-year partnership with Samuel Mockbee as Mockbee/Coker Architects. With the formation of buildingstudio, Coker sought to blur the boundaries between architecture, art, craft and thinking - rather than separate disciplines, each is essential to the larger realm of building. His work has received numerous honors including National AIA Honor awards, Architectural Record, “Record House” awards and P/A Design Awards. Coker has lectured extensively at universities and professional forums and has participated in numerous design juries across the country. Coker’s work has been published and exhibited widely both at home and internationally.

Teaching Assistants

Conner Bryan
Laura Edwards
### Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Field</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Austin</td>
<td>Ana Calhoun</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Casey-Marie Claude</td>
<td>Planning, Sustainable Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brittany Cooper</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Cunningham</td>
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<td>Anna Katsios</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Cameron Kraus</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Bich Tran Hoang Le</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gordon Lee</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Andrea Lewis</td>
<td>Planning, Public Policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Matthew Martinec</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Marianne Nepsund</td>
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<td>Nathaniel Schneider</td>
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<td>Allison Stoos</td>
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<td>Jordan Teitelbaum</td>
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<td>Carrie Waller</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Miami University</td>
<td>Catherine Berry</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Escola da Cidade</td>
<td>Alessandra Figueiredo</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
<td>Brian Gaudio</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Waterloo</td>
<td>Daniel Sebaldt</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Kansas</td>
<td>Riley Uecker</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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</tbody>
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**Program Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Site Visit</td>
<td>Introductions. First site visit and site writing exercises. Meet with Will Meredith, MFI Real Estate project sponsor. Shop orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Initial Drawings &amp; Student Visit</td>
<td>Build bird houses and bat boxes. Students begin initial drawings, readings, and construction exercises. Group design reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Project Design</td>
<td>Visit students and tour school for Eco Rise Youth Innovations. Initial construction exercise. Project designs and group design reviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Project Design &amp; Student Visit</td>
<td>Interaction and final reviews with Eco Rise students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Final Designs</td>
<td>Final design, including material selection. Purchase first phase of materials. Begin construction drawings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>On-campus Construction</td>
<td>Begin construction at UT campus. Initial layout of design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeks 7 &amp; 8</td>
<td>On-campus Construction</td>
<td>Construction on UT campus. Finalize material selection and fabrication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Student Work &amp; Transit</td>
<td>Transport components to sites. Begin site install of foundation work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>On-Site Work</td>
<td>Complete on-site construction and installation. Final review. Community celebration.</td>
</tr>
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Team Members

Catherine Berry  Tran Le
Ana Calhoun    Andrea Lewis
Brittany Cooper  Jordan Teitelbaum
Alessandra Figueiredo  Riley Uecker
Nicole Joslin  Carrie Waller
Cameron Kraus

Brief

The north project is immediately east of the MLK light rail stop, on a brownfield resulting from a precast concrete plant that closed a couple of decades ago. Overlooking the creek, this project sits on several acres of land beginning to undergo redevelopment. A community garden sponsored by The Sustainable Food Center has just begun and a new community pavilion and BMX park is coming soon. A several mile extension to the Boggy Creek hike and bike trail will bring park users from across East Austin. Even with these improvements, Boggy Creek itself is neither accessible nor seen from much of this planned development. Consequently, the goal of this project is to offer access to the creek. A series of platforms and a large portal bring visitors down to a heavily shaded riparian zone where they might gain a better appreciation of urban watershed ecology while enjoying the creek’s intimate setting.

The site plan is oriented along a tree line at the upper edge of a twenty-foot high bluff that overlooks the creek’s floodplain. Several platforms traverse the steep slope down to the creek offering moments for pause and reflection. In the more open area above, other platforms at varying heights provide additional seating that focus back toward the community garden. At the main portal and a covered reclining deck, young artists from the nearby Meredith Learning Center, contributed ceramic tile mosaic art that expresses their impressions of the creek. Reclaimed cedar mixed with new cedar and concrete elements were the primary materials used in this project. The cedar forming the bases of the platforms were treated with an ebonizing solution to ground the structures and provide a contrast to the decking wrapping around the tops of the platforms.
**Concept**

Our first foray into group design was a palimpsest drawing, which is the combination of individual drawings into one. The drawings varied greatly from experiential, abstract representations to quite literal drawings of scenes from the site. The end results were quite compelling, with the final product being more than simply the sum of its parts. - Jordan Teitelbaum

First, we worked on a preliminary design and construction exercise building bat boxes and bird houses. Even though the project was small, the process was informative in terms of working through a complete design idea while considering constructability and a group construction process.

In addition to this exercise, we met with the Rosewood Neighborhood Association. Working with people who are so invested in the neighborhood—some having been raised in the neighborhood and some newer residents—provided invaluable insight into the history and current conditions of the neighborhood. The meeting helped to solidify broader expectations of the project, including safety concerns, environmental stewardship, and neighborhood involvement, and also helped to direct us to more specific design considerations such as site selection. - Ana Calhoun

**Design**

We started the third week working in small groups. While we were all discussing our ideas, I remembered the palimpsest exercise we did in the beginning of the semester. We think in a parallel process; it is not just about linking ideas, but also making them become one idea. When working on the palimpsest and in our group discussions, we had to see the opportunities of each idea, but we also had to make them one. At that point it’s not simple. Sometimes you have to compromise, but sometimes you have to convince people to see it your way. - Alessandra Figueiredo

A few students were fortunate to have the opportunity to go to Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change, a 22 acre retreat center located in Northwest Austin near Lake Travis. We led the children in a series of activities including a storyboard of their experiences outdoors, a word association sticker board, and a series of environmental knowledge questions such as “where does water go when it rains?”, “What is a watershed?” and “Do you like to play in sunny or shady areas and why?” We took note of what the children seemed to be fond of when outdoors and shared the information with the rest of the studio upon our return. The wide range of their favorite outdoor activities confirmed the fact that our role as designers is to provide them with a place for undirected playtime. - Riley Uecker

After some initial design work, we shifted our efforts to a landscape-based approach that focuses on an articulated ground plane rather than an oversized roof plane. By keeping the built structure low to the ground, the surrounding nature becomes the focus and the built intervention plays a supporting role. Our design is meant to be less didactic and more of an experiential learning tool.
The goal is to foster a positive relationship with nature through interaction with the natural environment and exploration of the creek. Through a few simple moves and a repeated module, this design can achieve a varied rich landscape that provides new views and better access to the creek. - Brittany Cooper

**Build**

Our first early mornings of the summer were spent cleaning up the reclaimed lumber we received. I think starting to build is really bringing out the leaders in our group.

We had a very productive day building form work for our concrete pieces over the first weekend of the build. It was a good opportunity to get people working with tools without the stress of building our more large-scale elements. Breaking up into smaller groups really helped us move quickly and efficiently, which will hopefully continue through the rest of the project. - Nicole Joslin

We are beginning to see the design take shape. Dimensional considerations are continuing to be altered and while not every construction detail has been worked out, the consistency in the construction system has already allowed us to break into smaller groups in order to work simultaneously.

The accumulation of platforms being completed on the deck alleviates some anxiety about all the work ahead. Likewise, I was very excited to see the ebonizing (or dark staining) treatment go on as it alters the character of the wood so drastically and will provide a nice contrast to the brighter wood decking, which is to go on next. - Cameron Kraus

We revisited the design of the portal, the primary threshold in the design. After building other elements, we noticed that in order for the portal to be a moment of pause in the design it needed to become more of an occupied space rather than a transitory space. This was accomplished by sizing up the width of the portal and thickening the interior walls to redirect the view. I was happy to see that the team was willing to redesign and question earlier design decisions. This showed how the build process could continue to influence the design. These design changes enrich the focal point of the design. - Tran Le

As the summer goes on we are starting to feel the pressure of the final deadline approaching. Though we built a majority of the project off site, there is still a fair amount of work to be done on site. The looming task of digging 70+ postholes pushes us to quickly complete the decking and transport the remaining pieces to the site. - Brittany Cooper
You gain a “primal appreciation,” to quote a colleague, for drinking water when required to work hard in high temperatures, an appreciation for all of nature, for that matter. There’s knowledge you can only gain by digging out postholes by hand, or stumbling down a slope, or treating a sunburn. The build process became so elemental, and engaging with design throughout construction brought a visceral understanding of what each decision meant.

The best part of the project for me was enjoying all the surprises our design offered...small nooks for trees, shading in just the right spaces, the total transformation experienced when passing through the portal, the way the leaves and the shadows of the leaves fell on their impressions in concrete...I’d like to take credit for all those things, but so many of them were unexpected. It’s naïve to assume all design projects work that way, but I’m so grateful that ours did. I’ll enjoy visiting the site for years to come and carry the things I’ve learned into life and practice. - Carrie Waller

The community involvement in our project was one of the most rewarding parts. Though for a long time it was unclear how and if it would be possible to really engage with the community, working on the ceramic mosaics with the kids from M Station became a highlight. Seeing the kids realize their work, from drawings to mosaics to the installed work was an affirmation of the project’s value, both now and in the future. - Cameron Kraus

Reflection

I will play tag.
I will discover new things.
I will build a fort.

Justin, age 12
Now that the project is finished it is really just starting. It’s open to people to use and re-create it. Maybe it will never be finished. It started with thoughts, blank paper, lines, and models and became real with wood, concrete, screws, tools and labor. Then, it will become even more real with people. If there weren’t people using it, the project would never be completed.

The shadows of the leaves on the wood in the end of the evening.

The leaves fallen on the casted concrete boards.

The kids playing in the creek at 6pm.

That’s the life of the project.

That’s what wasn’t on the paper.

Everyday activity will keep the project alive. The sun, the wind, the birds, the leaves, the creek, the kids, the light and the shade: this is life, this is movement, this is all part of the project now.

- Alessandra Figueiredo

Yo voy ir de canota je.
Yo también iré de pesca.
Voy a tener un picnic.

Keandrea, age 13
Team Members

Casey-Marie Claude
Matthew Martinec
John Cunningham
Marianne Nepsund
Kelly Denker
Nathaniel Schneider
Brian Gaudio
Daniel Sebaldt
Anna Katsios
Allison Stoos
Gordon Lee

Brief

The second site, about a mile-and-a-half south of the north project, also sits close to the creek. Until the 1970’s, this floodplain—now Boggy Creek Park—frequently flooded into the adjoining neighborhoods where people of color had been relocated in the 1920s. Exacerbating this problem, the area had been used as one of Austin’s informal garbage dumps until the time people began living there. As a way to remedy these deplorable conditions, the city acquired the floodplain area in the seventies and converted the land into a string of greenbelt parks complete with hike and bike trails, pavilions and open parkland with mature oak, cottonwood, and pecan trees. Here’s where the other eleven students chose to work on a series of three distinct projects between the trail and the creek.

Each structure had a specific theme addressing watershed conditions. The first design focused on the riparian zone bordering both sides of the creek. [Austin’s Watershed Department is currently expanding these riparian areas as a means to provide greater habitat for wildlife while helping to cleanse water runoff finding its way to the creek.] Three students who designed and built this work
provided seating facing the riparian zone where one can watch wildlife while learning more about native plant and animal species through a series of laser-cut images and text that line the screen walls of the pavilion.

A second nearby pavilion, built by another three students, focuses on the tree canopy overhead, which provides a welcome refuge of cool shade in summer. While the sidewalls of this structure are sheathed in reclaimed cedar screening, it’s open overhead so views are directed upward to the Live Oak canopy above. Sloped seating offering these upward views is seamlessly incorporated into angular-shaped structure. Quotes and poems from students at M Station describing how they like use the park, are laser-cut into the seating.

The third pavilion sits adjacent to the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center. This project is close to a section of the creek that was converted from a more natural stream with riparian edges to one that’s been stripped of vegetation and channelized. This pavilion addresses the human intervention that radically changed the creek by this obvious reference to the channelization. It also addresses the former residents who, until the seventies, lived on the very site where the student’s work is now constructed. This pavilion speaks to the human intervention that occurred when their families were first forced to move there and later when the City had the homes torn down to turn the area into a park. Students interviewed a number of the elderly residents who regularly visit the Senior Activity Center to find several who’d lived in the now-demolished homes along the Boggy Creek. A number of quotes about their experiences are laser-cut into this structure. Materials similar to the North project are used in the South projects, along with welded steel tube frames for two of the pavilions.

**Concept**

The summer began with the June-teenth celebration in Boggy Creek Park. To say that this celebration exemplified atypical public park use is an understatement. Celebrants drove their cars right into the park, staked out areas for their families’ occupation, and barbecued, listened to music, and rode around on horses all day.

We attempted to surreptitiously survey the event without making our presence known, a plan which was soon thwarted by outgoing celebrants. We spent time speaking to a family from just south of Austin of incredible friendliness and excessive generosity...

After our entire team identified three components of the park that we wanted to highlight, we set out to the park and located three buildable areas along an axis. The axis connects an existing pavilion with the Conley Guerrero Senior Activity Center and allows us views and experiences of the very components we hoped to bring attention to. Our goal was to tell a story of the transition of the creek from a natural occurrence to something greatly altered by human intervention, and thus the three conditions we aimed to highlight were the riparian zone, the tree canopy, and the transition of the creek from natural to channelize. - John Cunningham
At the beginning of the week a few students went to work with students at M Station to get started on their contributions to the project. We collected poems and stories about their favorite park experiences that could be laser etched into wood slats on the pavilions.

Although the kids were not receptive at first, we made writing into a timed game that they really got into. We had them each choose a photo of the site and then they had 30 seconds to come up with as many descriptive words about the photo that they could think of. The next round they traded and wrote sentences, the next a poem. It was fun to see the kids choosing the photos that spoke to them most and why. - Allison Stoos

Hear the sound of life.
The building of the foundations of nature.

Justin, age 12

Design

One recurrent theme since starting the studio has been the constructed, abandoned and reconstructed binary of architect(ure) versus planner(ing). Planning as a profession is applied social sciences; unable to hold onto rigid theoretical frameworks; instead, offering a way forward within a world of economic, political and social constraints. Similarly, the design-build challenge we are faced with is plagued with constraints that limit the potential of the project to impact the host community. The challenge is to locate the space where community interests can intersect the design-build process and create new connections and meaning for our respective design proposals. - Matthew Martinec

The Rosewood neighborhood association was very open-minded about our proposals. Their focus was on communicating cultural aspects of the neighborhood, namely its legacy of social and environmental injustice. They raised some good questions and even threw out a few of their own ideas. However, I was disappointed at the small turnout of residents. Though we had all the green lights that we needed, I worry that getting approval from so few people may not be accurately representing the interests of the entire neighborhood. There doesn’t seem to be a great way to remedy this - people are as involved as they want to be. But I think their positive responses are a good indicator that we can move forward. - Marianne Nepsund

To get a sense of the scale of our structure and to start mocking up some cladding variations, we taped its profile on a wall in the hallway next to the studio, adding the deck and bench locations on the floor. This allowed us to test appropriate heights and proportions. We noticed that the proposed bench height was a bit too short, so we raised it. The deck felt a bit too wide, so we made that a few inches shorter. The bench length looked nicely proportional to the rest of the structure, but we tweaked its location along the deck. It was clear that the close-to-vertical surface facing the senior activities center was a prominent element and would be easily seen from afar, just as planned. - Daniel Sebaldt
Build

As the build began we really felt the stress of transitioning from design to building. We designed up until the minute when we had to place our material order. We still have much to figure out with our bench and how the info screens go together, but we began to mock up some ideas and size components. Choosing the right screw, the right washer, the right bolt, makes all the difference when designing these details. We’ve also started to hone in on what educational information we want to display. We’ve settled on a map of the Austin area watershed and various plant and animal identifications.

-Marianne Nepsund

Welding is a hot, challenging process. While the principles seem relatively simple, it’s really difficult to control the bead of the weld and to make even, consistent contact between the pieces you’re trying to weld without cutting into the metal. In spite of that, it was a lot of fun to put the structure together and problem-solve the best way to assemble it so that everything was square and dimensionally accurate. All told, it took about 5 hours to fab the main structure of one of the pavilions. I felt like we worked really well as a team and it was a good bonding experience for us all to get so intimately involved in the most technically challenging part of our project.

-Nathaniel Schneider

This week we had the opportunity to truly take to heart Coleman’s advice that we should “never stop designing”. While we had originally intended to fasten all of the cladding on our “wall” in a simple, vertical manner, it was decided instead that we would tilt them slightly. This allows observers from the east and the west to see slanted wood pieces on our “counter” portion instead of cladding going straight up and down all along our structure. I’m extremely happy with how it looks and I’m happy to be working in a setting where flexibility and thoughtfulness are quite prevalent because I feel that it has enabled us to be continually in the process of creating the best project possible.

-Casey-Marie Claude

Moving into the last week of construction, every day is a challenge, and everyone in the studio wants to be productive. At this point, time management is critical since construction tasks will run simultaneously. Managing manpower, time, imagination, and even human emotion has become so important. We have to distribute our resources smartly in order to achieve our daily goals. As a team, we have to communicate ideas sporadically but efficiently to keep everyone on the same page. We try to schedule milestones on our calendar and keep up with them while maintaining some flexibility for unexpected challenges.

While working on site, we had a lot of curious neighbors come by and ask questions about our project. They shared their personal impressions of the park and expressed how appreciated the structures we were building are. They make the park goers see the park in a different light. Many expressed that they find the park more interesting and beautiful with the structures there. I also notice that more people seem to be exploring the park now than before. Our structures really are already changing the experience of the park.

-Gordon Lee
It really is interesting to see how construction is carried out in “real life”, or at least the ways in which our group dealt with the little hiccups that we encountered along the way. I think that I had always assumed that there was a specific, right, safe, mathematically calculated and scientifically tested way to accomplish everything when building a structure, but it turns out that is not the case at all.

For example, we made several attempts to fasten the concrete triangles on our structure: threading the wire over the wood – the concrete pulled away from the surface, creating a gap; pulling the wire under the wood – the concrete triangle fell down below the line created by the wood siding, ruining the façade. We finally settled upon drilling through the wood so that the wire would be pulled directly back at a 90-degree angle from the concrete itself and it worked. While this was simply the solution to a silly little detail, the general process of arriving at our own solutions occurred many times throughout our project, and it allowed me to gain an entirely new perspective on how construction is carried out. It also has given me the confidence to take on my own projects in everyday life.

There are not many classes that have consumed my life as much as Public Interest Design, nor are there many that have provided me with even a remotely comparable sense of accomplishment. I’ve acquired life skills that I believe will prove incredibly helpful in my career as a planner.

- Casey-Marie Claude

“At that time, back then - everybody was an important member of the community.”

Former Resident
I am proud that we designed something that effectively communicates the message we were trying to send, while also fulfilling the most basic needs originally expressed by the community—shady places for people (especially kids) to enjoy the park. Initially I had some doubts about if we could create this “experience” that we spent so much time discussing and refining.

I have always in the back of my mind wondered if most architects really just end up designing for other architects, missing the other 99% of the population who have better things to do than talk about thresholds, moments, transitions and layering. But people got it. Evidence of this is the people who stopped by in the final days of construction and told us how much they liked using the pavilions. Often they first commented on how unique it was (what I affectionately mentally translate as weird) but how it creates a different world within it.

Each person who came up to me talked about how much they liked looking up at the trees. *Nowhere is there a sign that says “please look up at the trees,” but this is exactly what we had hoped would happen*. People said that they could “spend hours” in our kiosk. This may be an exaggeration, but it demonstrated to me our success in creating a special place to appreciate the everyday beauty found in their park. Seeing kids run around the structures is great. They climb, they jump, they read, they crawl underneath, and they even occasionally sit on the bench. *They are not afraid to make this “thing” part of their own world.* - *Kelly Denker*

*El árbol es verde.*
*La corteza es dura y áspera.*
*La tierra se ve pequeña.*

*DeShawn, age 12*
RESEARCH SEMINAR & EXTERNSHIP
Research Seminar & Externship
June 6 – August 13, 2013

Background

Historically, the design professions have served the interests of elites. We have been, as an unknown wag holds, “tailors to the rich.” Our role has been to tastefully serve and represent the wealthy and powerful so as to reinforce their status in society. As 16th century French courtier Philibert de l’Orme (1514-1570) argued, “by hiring a good architect, one could avoid being ridiculed because of an ill-designed or unfinished building.”

The intentions of Enlightenment thinkers in Britain, France, and colonial America sought to change all of that. The appearance of “modern” architecture, at least in Europe, was always conceptually linked to serving the needs of all humanity — its intentions were emancipatory. In the United States, however, Modern architecture has been generally understood as an aesthetic preference linked to industrial production. If there has been an emancipatory intention in this movement, it has been indirectly linked to the concept of social justice through cost reductions that would allow more evenly distributed patterns of consumption. Modern architecture in the United States has, then, never really been modern, if we also mean by that term emancipatory action.

The still evolving concept of sustainability, first defined in the 1980s, has recouped some modern intentions, but has rejected or renovated others. Sustainable, or as some prefer, regenerative architecture, rejects the bifurcation of subjects and objects, culture and nature, and links the well-being of natural systems to that of social systems. Without social stability and health, advocates argue, there cannot be environmental health, and vise versa.

Mainstream sustainability, however — what many refer to as ecological modernization — is generally unconcerned with emancipatory action. The “green movement” has, however, advanced significantly in developing metrics with which to measure the ecological impact of technological change, but little has been done to measure social impact. The purpose of this course was to study evolving methods of measuring the social consequences of architectural production and contribute to the development of Post-occupancy Evaluation (POE) methods.

Historians have customarily assessed works of art on the basis of the artists’ intentions. However, beginning in the 1980’s, German reception theorists began to assess works of art by measuring the gap between the artists’ intentions and reception by the community. With similar goals in mind, this seminar developed methods to measure two dimensions of architecture: (1) The estimated Vs. actual consumption of energy and water in quantitative terms. And (2), the intended Vs. received social consequences of building in qualitative terms. Developing such skills and methods will contribute to building a long-term empirical basis for assessing architectural production.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be exposed to the historical development of Post-occupancy Evaluation (POE) as an alternative mode of architectural judgment.
2. Students will learn the basic measurements used by “conventional” POE.
3. “Advanced POE” will be a theoretical proposal developed by the class as a whole.
4. Students will learn basic techniques of data collection and interpretation of case studies as well as how to report their findings.

The Seminar

The seminar was conducted in both summer sessions: The first session served three groups of students: (1) those also enrolled in the second summer session PID Externship; (2) those who were enrolled in the PID summer design/build studio with Professor Coleman who wished to assess the social reception of their work, and; (3) those with a general interest in the empirical assessment of planning, architectural, and landscape projects. It was not required to be enrolled in both the design/build studio and seminar, but overlap was welcome. The first summer session seminar was a prerequisite for the Externship, but students were not required to take both.

Course Requirements

In the seminar, each student had four basic responsibilities:

1. For each day’s reading, they wrote a 2-page critical synopsis. Roughly half of their text summarized the author’s basic argument and the other half critically analyzed it by applying it to their final paper/proposal.
2. Twice during the session, each student served as respondent—meaning that s/he presented a 15 minute critical analysis of the reading at the beginning of class.
3. Each student conducted a POE on a previous UT PID project or wrote a detailed proposal to conduct a POE on a larger scale project of their choice. Each student collected and interpreted the data required to understand the gap, or the degree to which there is one, between the intentions of the design team and the reception of the community served. This work served as preparation for Externship students in the second summer session.
4. All students had a responsibility to actively participate in seminar discussion.

The Externship

The PID Externship was conducted as parallel Independent Study projects with two group workshops conducted by Amy Ress of Public Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. Each extern conducted a POE on one of the following projects:

1. LifeWorks: Miro/Rivera Architects
2. Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH): LZT Architects
3. M-Street: Tom Hatch Architect, Foundation Communities

The three PID Externship reports will be published online by the CSD and Public Architecture. What follows are excerpts from the final reports and a reading list for further research.
Steven Moore teaches design and courses related to the philosophy, history, and application of sustainable technology. In 1999 Moore was appointed Director of the Sustainable Design Program, in 2002 he was co-founder of the University of Texas Center for Sustainable Development, and in 2006 he became Bartlett Cocke Professor of Architecture and Planning. Moore received his undergraduate degree in architecture from Syracuse University, his Ph.D. from Texas A&M University, and is a Loeb Fellow of the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He has practiced as the design principal of Moore/Weinrich Architects in Maine and has received numerous regional and national awards for design distinction.

Moore has recently published articles in Center, the Journal of Architectural Education (JAE), and the Journal of Architecture (JOA), Urban Studies, and Science Studies. He has published, co-authored, or edited five books related to the social construction of sustainable technologies, buildings, and cities. With support from the National Science Foundation (NSF) he has just released a new book, Questioning Architectural Judgment: The Problem with Codes in the United States.

Collaborating Instructors

John Peterson
Amy Ress

Teaching Assistant

Sam Gelfand
**Students**

**University of Texas at Austin**
- Shannon Harris
- Joe Marshall
- Jessica Mills
- Alison Steele
- Adam Thibodeaux
- Anna Katsios
- Marianne E. Nepsund
- Joshua Lee

**North Carolina State University**
- Brian Gaudio

**Sustainable Design Architecture**
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
- Architecture
## Program Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Topics: design judgment; the vernacular; modern innovation; social responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td>Conventional POE</td>
<td>Topics: POE concepts; PA thought experiment; the professional context of POE; British POE; building type and governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td>The Certification Revolution</td>
<td>Topics: contradictions in capitalism; LEED; Sustainable Sites Initiative; SEED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III</td>
<td>Advanced POE</td>
<td>Topics: context and the empirical turn; reception theory and POE;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part IV</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>POE case selection; basic research: concepts and terms; methods;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part V</td>
<td>Research Workshop</td>
<td>POE case study design and presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Overview

The planning and design of the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) generated excitement among the many groups who propelled its development. These groups included the social services organizations advocating on its behalf, the architects and their team, the city’s representatives on the project, the LEED specialist, and the homeless population. Their excitement stemmed from a vision of ARCH as a sustainable building. This term was understood to require the building to perform ecologically, economically, and equitably. In that state-of-mind, the designers and the clients placed importance on sustainability not simply for LEED accreditation — ARCH is a LEED Silver-rated building — but as a holistic attitude about the project’s mission and potential.

Flexibility proved to be another important concept that emerged in the design process and then significantly in the life of the building. Aware of a need for some degree of flexibility within the building, the designers accounted for some potential future changes. Meanwhile, in the ten years since its completion, ARCH has continued to evolve in its use, organization, and inhabitation. In this manner, ARCH falls on the scale of regenerative design. The discourse of regenerative design invites examination of a building’s starting point, the original intentions that generated its design, as well as its real-life results: how it functions, performs, and is received over time. This report examined ARCH in the same way, registering the intentions, receptions and evolution that describe
the building’s life. ARCH, an ever-dynamic community, certainly manifests a co-evolution between building and inhabitant, and presents a compelling case study linking the flexibility of buildings and the housing of social services.

**Objectives**

The ARCH building invites a broader definition of sustainability beyond green energy standards alone. In both academia and non-academic publications, the definition of sustainability has been refined to include a model of overlapping circles, or a triangle that gives equal weight to three elements: social equity, economic, and ecological interests. We examine the balance between the Three E’s as they pertain to ARCH. Using the model of the triangle, we will measure the intentions of the design team and other relevant social groups according to their vision for the ARCH facility. Similarly, we used the same model to place the reception of those who are impacted by the ARCH facility.

**Conclusions**

We determine the gap between intention and reception in the ARCH building to be wide. It has been narrowed somewhat by the actions of some stakeholders, such as Legge, Front Steps staff, and the city, since they have approved many programming changes in response to changing needs. The design also narrowed the gap since it allowed some social equity goals to be met. In that regard, the building still functions to make the homeless issue in downtown Austin a very visible process.

We would like to see even more involvement between the homeless community and the building — perhaps ongoing beautification efforts, or providing a training program for the homeless to learn basic maintenance of some of the LEED features, thereby giving them job skills to carry forward and giving them a vested interest in the building and other sustainably-designed buildings like it. For ARCH and its mission to continue, we feel the process of coevolution must continue and must include administrative reorganization of how the building is governed and maintained. The spatial and communicative dysfunction between those who occupy the building and those who inhabit it is unsustainable. It is our hope co-evolution would continue to enhance the mission and the building itself.
Project Overview

M Station is an affordable housing community located on Boggy Creek in the Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Boulevard Transit-Oriented District (TOD) of east Austin. In addition to housing, the project includes an on-site learning center, a preschool, and adult education programs. M Station is also distinguished by a LEED for Homes Platinum certification as well as numerous awards for merit. This is not your typical housing community; M Station is owned and managed by the nonprofit organization, Foundation Communities (FC). Their mission is “to create housing where families succeed.” The goal of which, is to not only provide housing to low-income families, but to provide the tools they need for success, or as one FC resident put it, “I wasn’t looking for a handout, just a hand up.”

Hatch + Ulland Owens Architects (H+UO), who are also known both for their work in affordable housing and emphasis in sustainable design, designed M Station. H+UO is committed to building responsibly and bolstering community. They worked closely with FC’s Design and Development Director Sunshine Mathon to come up with a vision for what one resident calls “the M Station experience.”

Objectives

Affordable housing is significant, not only to the economic environment of its residents, but to that of the broader community, as it plays a key role in Austin’s economy. This is less of a philanthropic or ethical claim than a pragmatic concern of urban
Linear-Analytic Case Study: M Station

Triangulation of methods

- Literature Review
- Quantitative Analysis
- Qualitative Analysis

- FC intentions
- h + uo intentions
- gap analysis
- resident receptions

Benchmarks
- M-Station projected performance
- M-Station actual performance
- Standard multi-family unit performance

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Observation

- TODs
- Affordable housing
- Gentrification
- Sustainability
- POEs

- Energy usage
- Gas usage
- Residential water usage
- Irrigation water usage
- Metro rail volume

End goal: to provide a framework that can help inform decision making for future development.

(unintended consequences)
management. The $55 million Affordable Housing Bond approved by Austin voters in 2006 helped to generate $865 million. Another Affordable Housing Bond, similar to the one M Station benefited from, was on the ballot in November 2013. This is just one reason why this Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE) is essential. POEs analyze the complex process of bringing a built project to fruition. Not only can this help to identify potential adjustments in performance, but it can inform decision making in future projects. It is also significant by providing clear documentation of economic consequences. With the new Affordable Housing Bond approaching, it’s important to show voters what municipal funding has done in the past, in order to edify their future decisions. M Station is providing a support system that can help to narrow the inequity gap in Austin, and is a model for future development worth evaluating.

My report is a linear-analytic case study measuring the intended and unintended consequences of M Station’s development. My analysis was conducted through a constructivist lens in order to allow findings to emerge that may not have been specifically sought. Instead of justifying a prior hypothesis, I chose to explore paths of qualitative and quantitative analysis without prior assumptions. The scope of this POE was narrowed to focus on the perceptions of resident toward the sustainable technology systems implemented at M Station. In order to obtain objective and subjective measures in pursuit of this “gap analysis” I have employed the following methods: literature reviews, interviews, surveys, observation, and quantitative data collection.

Conclusions

It appears Foundation Communities has achieved its goal of becoming a model for the industry. The many awards and accolades it has received can attest to this. From my understanding of Hatch and Ulland’s comments, FC seemed to have more involvement than that of their typical clients. They have continued to collaborate on subsequent projects, which conveys a positive experience in their collaboration on M Station. The success of M Station was in large part due to their integrated design approach. Their goals were clearly stated from the beginning and all stakeholders were thoroughly involved throughout the entire process. Although there were a few less than optimal occurrences during construction, namely those dealing with the 100 year flood zone, these are sometimes an unavoidable part of the continual learning process. The largest gap between intentions and receptions lays mostly in the innovative environmental systems, namely the irrigation and HVAC. Both of these systems were not conceived during the initial design phase, but were later implemented due to budget constraints. This is a good indicator of the importance of setting a realistic budget from the start. The experience of working on M Station has provided both FC and H+UO with lessons they can take with them into their future projects, as I hope this Post-Occupancy Evaluation will do as well.
Lifeworks East Austin
Joe Marshall and Adam Thibodeaux

Project Overview

LifeWorks is a nonprofit organization based in Austin, Texas with roots in the community dating back to 1910. Their mission is “supporting youth and families on the path to self-sufficiency and life-long success.” LifeWorks’ services span counseling, housing/homelessness, education/workforce, and youth development. Each LifeWorks facility houses a distinct mix of services uniquely suited to the needs of the immediate area, and there is significant variation in facility size. The largest, most comprehensive site is the East Austin branch.

When LifeWorks decided they needed to create a new hub in order to better serve the East Austin community, the organization employed a competitive bid process in order to find the design firm that could listen to their goals and best translate them into a building. The goals they set forth were: 1) to connect with nature, 2) to provide safety and security, and 3) to create an optimistic and transformational space.

A firm primarily involved in high-end residential design—Miró Rivera Architects (MRA)—won the competition in February 2009. In order to gain a thorough understanding of what LifeWorks needed, MRA’s Project Architect, Ken Jones, immersed himself within the organization. He paid a great deal of attention to space and flow, asking many questions, and attending meetings for every program and sub-program of LifeWorks. His was an ethnographic approach to program development. In May 2012, the project was completed and LifeWorks gained the strong foothold it sought in the East Austin community, as well as a focal point for organizational growth.

Objectives

We performed this post-occupancy evaluation to help provide LifeWorks with valuable information on the performance of their newest facility, and to explore the function of architecture as a technology for improvement in an organizational context.

The methods that we employed in this evaluation included the collection and interpretation of both qualitative date [drawn from interviews and design meeting reports] and quantitative data [drawn from annual reports, proposals, surveys, zip code data, and building performance data].

From these data we conducted an evaluation generally consistent with what social scientists refer to as “content analysis.” This term generally refers to the serial separation of the collected data into categories, and the subsequent naming of the categories as a method of “sense-making.” Care is taken to let the data speak for itself, rather than to “project” our own expectations into the categories. At the end of this exercise we identified three meta-categories that characterized the “intentions” of the design team—meaning the collective aspirations, or goals of all the individuals from LifeWorks and MRA who influenced decision-making. These categories are:

- Programmatic Growth
- Comfort and Security
- Budget and Sustainability
Conclusions

All of the data that we have collected supports Lifeworks’ belief that “consistent, measurable, positive outcomes” have been produced since the building’s opening. Undoubtedly, a large portion of the success must be attributed to the LifeWorks staff and programs. Nevertheless, the impact of the building itself cannot be dismissed. When LifeWorks requested a building that connected with nature and supported their mission, Miró Rivera Architects provided a facility that has significantly eased the burdens of energy consumption and freed up capital for organizational growth. When LifeWorks asked for a safe, secure site, they were provided with a building that has garnered overwhelmingly positive reviews from both staff and clients. And when LifeWorks sought an optimistic, transformational space, they were rewarded with a rapidly expanding clientele and donor network.

The LifeWorks East site serves as a prime example of how architecture can be used as a tool, or technology, to achieve specific organizational goals. Each of the three meta-intentions, as defined at the building’s conception, have been satisfied. Although there have been a few minor unintended consequences of design features, they are minor and resolvable. In other words, the gap between intention and reception is small. LifeWorks has improved both their ability to serve the East Austin community and their organizational structure on the whole. They have also put themselves in a position to be successful in what already appears to be a rapidly changing urban environment. The key factors in their success have been their effective communication, both internally and with the design team; their acute attention to detail throughout the design process; and the strong partnership they forged with MRA.

Finally, the LifeWorks East building is a prime example of how architecture can be used as a technology to support the efforts of public-interest organizations. Our hope is that this post-occupancy evaluation might help other “design teams” to narrow the gap between their intentions and the reception of the communities served.
"The location where I received services was **SAFE AND COMFORTABLE** [e.g., cleanliness, parking, lighting, etc.]

83.7% STRONGLY AGREE

9% POSITIVE MENTION OF BUILDING

"WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST about LifeWorks services?"

- Comfortable environment.
- The facility is very homey and welcoming
- The location is close and convenient
- It is close, clean, safe and pretty
- The location and programs they offer are great

57% POSITIVE MENTION OF BUILDING

"Why or why not did you find this to be A SAFE LOCATION?"

- Very clean and it felt safe.
- Clean and comfortable.
- The location is beautiful and spacious.
- Great building"
CONCLUSION
The PID program concluded with a tour of the completed projects. Reflecting upon the process of undertaking a design–build approach to community building, students articulated successes, challenges, and opportunities.

Projects were evaluated from the point of view of several stakeholders, including community members, the students themselves, participating faculty, the City of Austin, and the University of Texas at Austin. Deemed a success from all of these perspectives, the PID program had wide-reaching benefits that united diverse participants.

Integrating the knowledge of diverse stakeholders and disciplines, the PID program drew from architecture, landscape architecture, planning, urban design, and geography. The PID projects thus became platforms for students to work across disciplines while focusing concerted efforts to a common cause.

While the PID projects are small in physical scope, the intent is that as a growing network of projects they contribute to the broader PID discourse and continue to cultivate deep community roots through building.
RESOURCES & BIBLIOGRAPHY
Design/Build Practicum Resources

Eco Rise Youth Innovations, Austin, TX: www.ecorise.org

Rosewood Neighborhood Association: http://www.main.org/rosewood/index.html

Life Works, Austin TX: http://www.lifeworksaustin.org/

Friends of Boggy Creek: http://friendsofboggy.blogspot.com/

Austin Youth River Watch: http://www.ayrw.org/

American Youth Works, Austin, TX: http://www.americanyouthworks.org/

Creative Action, Austin, TX: www.creativeaction.org

East Austin Environmental Justice Project: http://www.ayrw.org/

PODER People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources: An Austin Grassroots Effort Redefining Environmental, Economic and Social Justice Issues: http://www.poder-texas.org/


City of Austin Watershed Protection Department: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/watershed-protection/programs

City of Austin Watershed Protection Department: Riparian Restoration: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/riparian-restoration

City of Austin Watershed Protection Department: Environmental Integrity Index: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/environmental-integrity-index

City of Austin Watershed Integrity Score: South Boggy Creek Fact Sheet: http://www.austintexas.gov/GIS/FindYourWatershed/Factsheet.aspx?id=90

City of Austin Watershed Protection Department: Watershed Map: http://cherrywood.org/archive/map/42~Austin_watersheds.pdf


Travis County: Lower Colorado River Surface Water Quality: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/TNR/crcp/pdfs/03_CRCP_Water_QualityRN.pdf


Environmental Protection Agency: The Urban Stream Syndrome: http://www.epa.gov/caddis/ssr_urb_urb2.html

Environmental Protection Agency: Managing Urban Runoff: http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/nps/urban.cfm

Environmental Protection Agency: How Urbanized Areas Affect Water Quality: http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/nps/urban_facts.cfm

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: Nest boxes and Birdhouses: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/birding/birdhouses/

Texas Bluebird Society: http://texasbluebirdssociety.org/index.php


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**General**


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Other Building Assessment Systems

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CASBEE (Japan Sustainable Building Consortium, www.ibec.or.jp/CASBEE/english)
SBAT (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, SBAT Tool [http://www.csir.co.za/Built_environment/Architectural_sciences/sbat.html])

Other Frameworks

One Planet Living Framework [http://www.oneplanetliving.org].

Post-occupancy Evaluation


**Civic Environmentalism**


Hempel, Lamont C. 1999. “Conceptual and Analytical Challenges in Building Sustainable Communities.” In Toward Sustainable Communities: Transitions and Transformations in Environmental Policy, edited by Daniel Mazmanian


**Expert/Local Knowledge**


Public Interest Design


Social Learning


