PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN

Summer Course Series: 2011

Editors
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Conner Bryan
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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
csd Center for Sustainable Development
Public Interest Design

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Editors
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Conner Bryan
Jane Winslow

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Bryan Bell
Barbara Brown Wilson

Co-collaborators
David Perkes
Emily Axtman
Sarah Gamble

Visiting Lecturers
Victoria Ballard Bell
John Peterson
Steven Moore
Jess Zimbabwe
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
INTRODUCTION
THE TEAM
THE PROCESS
THE PROJECTS
CONCLUSION
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
How this course was made possible.
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Bryan Bell  
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PID Organizer

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John Peterson  
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CSD Research Associate

Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Public Architecture

Austin Community Design + Development Center

Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation

Five Mile Farms

Public Works Department, The City of Austin

Office of Sustainability, The City of Austin

Guadalupe Association for an Improved Neighborhood

Also, a special thanks to the many students who contributed to this report.
INTRODUCTION
The case for public interest design.
In the design profession, often the needs of the underserved go unnoticed. Equity, one of the three fundamental factors of the “triple bottom line” of sustainability is frequently ignored and poorly understood by the decision makers and stakeholders in the design process. In today’s age of rapidly depleting natural resources, famines, natural disasters, and political tension, we can no longer ignore the fact that in order for us to advance and continue to prosper as a human race, we must create sustainable communities that are healthy, prosperous, and equitable places where people can live, work, and socialize.

In the United States, laws, rules and regulations have been enacted regarding the practice of architecture through licensure. In return, architects have the responsibility to create the physical world in a way that improves conditions and makes progress towards the greater public benefit, serving the general public just as other professionals do. However, the profession has largely focused on a small part of the population and a very limited set of issues, and it is currently the wealthy, the powerful, and large institutions that are involved in design decisions. Whitney Young, Jr., civil rights activist and former head of the Urban League, criticized the profession on this same issue over forty years ago while addressing the 1968 AIA conference: “You are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights, and I am sure this does not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance.”

However, there is an opportunity to change this now. The green design movement has opened a door. The public has realized a critical link between design and the environment, and between design and the future of our planet. The realization that design can play a role in addressing critical issues makes this a time to go further: to show how design can address other important issues as well, such as the impact design has on the social and economic well-being of the built environment. It is time for the green design movement to realize its full potential: to take the best ideas of the leading practitioners and from the most effective products, and shape these into accessible and transferable tools for the general public to use to make the built environment more socially and ecologically just.
THE TEAM
The students who were involved.

There were a total of twenty nine cross disciplinary students from across the country that took part in the first Public Interest Design Summer Course Series.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
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<th>Major</th>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Texas - Austin</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Kyle Engoian</td>
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<td>Geography + Urban Studies</td>
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<td>Rob Parsons</td>
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<td>Natalie Thomas</td>
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<td>Jane Winslow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvard Graduate School of Design</td>
<td>Emily McMillan</td>
<td>Landscape Architecture</td>
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<td>Bea Vithayathawornwong</td>
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<td>Georgia Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Kelly Heyer</td>
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<td>International Economics + Finance</td>
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<td>Jason Minter</td>
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<td>The College of Charleston</td>
<td>Michelle Strick</td>
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<td>The University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee</td>
<td>Molly Williams</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
<td>Emily Axtman</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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THE PROCESS
What took place over five weeks.
THE PROCESS

Brief

The summer course series emphasized the public nature of architecture and asserted that there are critical links between design and the environment, and between design and social and economic well being, on both an individual and community-wide scale. The program provided students with the tools needed to integrate equity as a necessary component of sustainability into their work, and also provided them with practical experience in the field and with connections to leading practitioners in public interest design across the nation.

Program Overview

The University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture (UTSoA), in collaboration with Design Corps, offered the first Public Interest Design (PID) summer course series which connected advanced students interested in the built environment and public service with leading practitioners in public design, and equipped them with the tools needed to create beautiful, sustainable, and community-enhancing spaces. In this program, students developed skills to leverage the practical and ethical complications of public service as a means to heighten the quality of their work by seeking innovative design solutions that positively impact larger social problems.

This summer’s group of students consisted of a cross disciplinary team of passionate, diverse, and extremely talented individuals. Graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Texas at Austin were joined by students from schools including the Harvard GSD, Georgia Institute of Technology, the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Syracuse University, the College of Charleston, Iowa State University, and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, forming an interdisciplinary group with backgrounds in architecture, landscape architecture, planning, urban studies, geography, political science, policy studies, economics, and sustainable design.

The PID program offers design students the opportunity to investigate what it means to be a public servant. Much like public health is to medicine, this program contributes to the emerging understanding of the civic role of design professions. It aims to contribute to the larger national discussion about how public design may be integrated into the architecture curriculum, operating in dialogue with other similar emerging programs. UTSoA hopes to serve as a hub for innovative thinking about the nature, ethics, and boundaries of public design, and to contribute to the larger dialogue already in progress as evidenced by exhibitions like the Cooper-Hewitt’s Design for the Other 90% and the Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement exhibit at MOMA.
Course Series Goals

The goals of the Public Interest Design summer course series were to:

- Create, define and expand the best practices of public interest design.
- Train and nurture progressive leaders who are just beginning careers in design to learn to apply the benefits of design and to address the needs of communities.
- Serve as a think tank for progressively minded activist designers at all stages of their careers.
- Listen to voices of all stakeholders in the community.
- Contribute to the long-term relationships formed by our partners with the community.
- Convey the ideas of community design through our projects and influence projects of this scale across the city.
- Show the public how design is relevant to their daily lives and issues.
- Teach one another.
- Respect each other: students, community members, faculty and partners.
- Get to know everyone and appreciate our diverse abilities.
- Understand the steps necessary to do community design on our own after the summer course series has concluded.
- Document our process.

The Public Interest Design summer course series pursued these goals through establishing the best models for:

- A participatory design process that involves mutual respect and understanding between community and designer.
- A participatory community asset identification process that encourages and inspires the active participation and contribution of ourselves and community members and stakeholders in the design process.
- A design process that transforms these assets into the built environment.
- A construction and implementation process that brings the solutions from design concepts to built reality.
Process Goals

Asset-based community context

- Distinguish between needs-based (top-down) and asset-based (grassroots) community building.
- Discuss practical case studies of successful asset-based strategies.
- Explore the challenges and advantages of an asset-based approach to community work.

Student assets

- Identify individual assets students bring to the work of the summer studio.
- Collaborate and apply individual assets toward common goals.

Communication

- Listen and understand the needs of real clients.
- Present design solutions to clients’ problems.
- Refine presentation skills in oral presentation of research and design ideas.

Community understanding

- Understand the diverse needs, values, and backgrounds in our cultures.
- Observe the social needs existing in the world.
- Understand the role designers can play in addressing identified community needs.

Collaboration

- Define big picture objectives and shared goals with others.
- Understand the benefits of pooled abilities and energy.

Form making

- Define and create design proposals for needed projects in the community.
- Research the relationship between materials and design objectives.
- Identify and apply the qualities of materials to full-scale details considering the design intentions.
- Construct the project, understanding the choice of materials and their connections.
Curriculum

Course Series Dates: 06.02 - 07.07.2011

The PID course series was comprised of two courses: a research seminar and a service-oriented practicum, conducted in tandem over five weeks of the summer session. The courses were coordinated and taught by Bryan Bell and Barbara Brown Wilson, and included an array of special guest lecturers from across the country, the University of Texas faculty, and from local community.

Research Seminar

In the seminar course, students gained an understanding of how to evaluate, analyze, and integrate public design theory and practice. Topics included: critical assessment of service-learning design/build projects; survey of public architecture; systems approaches to design thinking; bio-regional design; project management; and measuring results.

Service - Oriented Practicum

The service-oriented practicum was taught simultaneously to the research seminar. The focus of the practicum was allowing students to explore built forms through a design/build project. Students led a series of discussions between various community members while constructing small scale projects in Austin. Topics included: engaging the public through a design process; educating the public on the value of design; construction; detailing; and materiality.
Guest Lecturers

Each week a leading practitioner in public design served as a visiting instructor, actively participating in the program to enhance student knowledge and understanding. Visiting faculty were renowned leaders in the field of public interest design and provided students with an enhanced understanding of not only the theory and application of public design, but also the challenges and opportunities of integrating public interest design into practice. The series of distinguished guest lecturers served as a weekly catalysts - infusions of outside energy focused on specific aspects of public interest design.

Week 1  David Perkes  Methods
Week 2  Victoria-Ballard Bell  Materials
Week 3  John Peterson  Design Matters
Week 4  Steven Moore  Civic Environmentalism
Week 5  Jess Zimbabwe  Design at the Scale of the City
### Course Schedule

#### Week 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecturer:</th>
<th>David Perkes</th>
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| Tour:     | Austin urban farms with Steve Ross  
Meeting potential clients with Sarah Gamble. |
| Assignments: | Statement + questions for community  
Postcard exercise |
| Event:     | Guadalupe neighborhood history talk with Alex Avila |

Meeting and engaging community members begins. Students prepare a statement of engagement and a list of questions for community members.

Series of brainstorming and collective pin ups on project possibilities take place.

Formation of student teams begins.

Postcard exercise pin up takes place.

#### Week 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecturer:</th>
<th>Victoria-Ballard Bell</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour:</td>
<td>Green Guys Recycling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment:</td>
<td>Material exercise</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Events:   | Alley Flat Initiative  
Q+A at Terrazas  
Branch Library  
Neck Down Day: alley clean up + ramp project |

Material exercise pin up takes place.

“This I Believe, This I Can Do” presentations begin, showcasing students’ values.

Public interest design case study presentations begin.

Group project pin ups begin.

Teams are formed, each team begins individual meetings with clients / community members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th><strong>Lecturer:</strong></th>
<th>John Peterson</th>
<th>Team meetings with clients / community members continue.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Assignments:</strong></td>
<td>Pin up team ideas</td>
<td>Teams begin finalizing design ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td><strong>Lecturer:</strong></td>
<td>Steven Moore</td>
<td>Build portion of the program begins.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Assignment:</strong></td>
<td>Pin up team ideas</td>
<td>Teams make adjustments based upon clients’ / community members’ feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td><strong>Lecturer:</strong></td>
<td>Jess Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Final designs are completed.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong></td>
<td>Personal points submitted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cost sheets submitted</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Event:</strong></td>
<td>Alley Blitz takes place</td>
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<td>Grant writing session</td>
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<td>Group tour and closing remarks</td>
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SEED Process

As part of the summer course series, the class learned about the SEED certification process and related the steps to their summer projects. SEED® (Social Economic + Environmental Design) is a new process that provides a common standard to guide, evaluate and measure the social, economic and environmental impact of design projects.

SEED maintains the belief that design can play a vital role in the most critical issues that face communities and individuals, in crisis and in every day challenges. To accomplish this, the SEED process guides professionals to work alongside locals who know their community and its needs. This practice of “trusting the local” is increasingly recognized as a highly effective way to sustain the health and longevity of a place or a community as it develops.

SEED History

SEED was created in October of 2005, when a group of architects, designers, and other diverse experts in the public interest design movement convened for a roundtable discussion at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The group represented over 100 organizations, design advocates, and social activists. Their goal was to evaluate the existing social, economic, and environmental roles of architecture and design, and to strengthen those roles in low-wealth communities that struggle with a myriad of social challenges where they are needed most. From this initial meeting emerged the SEED Network. The network sees itself as part of a global movement driven by the belief that design can support a community from the ground up. Professionals experienced with design process work alongside locals who know their community and its needs to achieve the best of both worlds. Called “community-based design,” this practice of “trusting the local” is increasingly recognized as the most effective way to sustain the health and longevity of a place.

The original SEED meeting was organized by Stephen Goldsmith, Kathy Dorgan, Maurice Cox and Bryan Bell with funding from the Loeb Fellowship and assistance from Sally Young and Design Corps Fellow JoEllen Wang.

Four subsequent meetings in New Orleans, Baltimore, Dallas, and Austin have included hundreds of more participants who have developed the concept into a working tool.

At the beginning of each project discussed later in the report there is a list of performance measures for each project based upon the SEED certification process.
SEED Mission

SEED’s mission is to advance the right of every person to live in a socially, economically and environmentally healthy community.

The SEED guiding principles are:

**Principle 1:** Advocate with those who have a limited voice in public life.

**Principle 2:** Build structures for inclusion that engage stakeholders and allow communities to make decisions.

**Principle 3:** Promote social equality through discourse that reflects a range of values and social identities.

**Principle 4:** Generate ideas that grow from place and build local capacity.

**Principle 5:** Design to help conserve resources and minimize waste.
The summer program engaged an asset-based design approach. Rather than focusing on communities’ needs and problems, asset-based design focuses on the positive assets, skills, and capacities of communities in order to allow residents to become an active participant in the design process. Students learned that during the process, in order to create truly important, influential, and meaningful projects, that there must be an ongoing dialogue with and participation of community members, allowing them to voice concerns and give constructive feedback. This collaborative process empowers others through design; it shows the public that they are designers in their own right and that they too can create positive change in their own environments and communities.

The students were invited to share their personal assets and core beliefs with their fellow classmates in a “this I believe, this I can do” format. In these presentations, students looked within themselves and shared with the group their deepest held beliefs and the values they put forth in their work. This exercise not only allowed the students to look within themselves, but to also build trust with one another through sharing their own stories.
THE PROCESS
For the first two weeks of the program, the class met collectively to share ideas on possibilities for projects. During this time, students began meeting with community members, listening to their concerns and understanding their values and assets. After the initial series of meetings with community members, students proposed design solutions which focused on the concerns they had heard. Those ideas were then presented internally within the studio along with a discussion based on the merits of each idea. After this round of design proposals, the best ideas were selected for further discussion and refinement of ideas to respond to community members’ comments.

In every pin-up session, negative comments were put aside and only good ideas were discussed. Every individual’s opinions and comments were heard which made for a very democratic design process: one that harbored a positive atmosphere and led to a successful final outcome.
In this exercise, the class was asked to explore the area of East Austin through the creation of “postcards.” Each card was meant to highlight the poetic quality of forms and spaces of the city, and capture the character of the each of their respective contexts.

Each student presented their postcard in a collective pin-up the following week. The discussion covered a variety of topics ranging from issues of history and culture, to topics like meaning and place.
Student postcard.
The class took a field trip to San Marcos, TX to Green Guys Recycling to collect found articles for a material study exercise.

The class was asked to use the material they found at the junkyard and exploit its properties by creating a connection with itself or another material. They were not allowed to use glue or any other adhesive.

After collectively pinning up, the class was asked to select studies that showcased:

- Best use of a material’s property
- Best use of properties to create a connection
- Most durable connection
- Highest craft
- Most beautiful overall
- Heroic failure
Students discussing their material studies.
During a ‘neck down’ event, or a volunteer work day, students cleaned two alleyways in the Guadalupe neighborhood. The hope for the alley cleanup was that it would serve as a positive initial gesture and a catalyst for engagement with the community. The purpose was to not only clean the alleys, but more importantly, to show the community members that the students were truly invested in the project and ready and willing to do the work required to effectively make positive change in the neighborhood.

Student tasks included trash pick up, trimming back overgrown vegetation, and collecting other loose debris.
THE PROCESS
During another ‘neck down’ event, students constructed a ramp for Ms. Rios, an elderly resident in the Guadalupe neighborhood, who was having difficulty accessing her front lawn due to the steep steps. The students solved this problem by constructing a handicapped-accessible ramp. Students were drawn to Ms. Rios’ warmth, her heritage, and her family’s history in the neighborhood.

The project was designed and constructed in one day.
THE PROCESS
A group tour was taken during the second week of the program to a collection of urban farm sites around Austin.

Tour stops included: Five Mile Farms, Festival Beach Community Gardens, the Blackland Neighborhood, Mobile Loaves + Fishes, and Urban Roots.

Stops on urban farm tour.
At the culmination of the five-week course, the students hosted an Alley Blitz. All stakeholders were invited out to the Guadalupe neighborhood to view the four projects and celebrate their successful completion. The projects varied in size and scope, but their goals were the same—to have a positive impact on the neighborhood and to provide designs that could be modified and utilized by various members of the larger community.
GUADALUPE NEIGHBORHOOD

ALLEY BLITZ CELEBRATION

WED JULY 6TH 5-7PM
ALLEYWAY BETWEEN 8th & 9th AND SAN MARCOS

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN STUDENTS, RESIDENTS, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS AND HELP CELEBRATE THEIR WORK TO TRANSFORM THE ALLEYS OF EAST AUSTIN.

SEE THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT AND LEARN ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

Enjoy light refreshments from local restaurants and growers.
THE PROJECTS
The finished products.
There were a total of four design-build projects that were completed during the five week program:

**GREENING ALLEYS PROJECT**
Making alleys into assets

**FIVE MILE FARMS PROJECT**
Growing local food + economy

**SHED (+) PROJECT**
Putting yards to good use

**HERITAGE FENCE PROJECT**
Guadalupe neighborhood preservation
Greening Alleys Project
Making Alleys Into Assets

Program

Traffic calming
Address markers
Garbage unit
Supergraphics

Team members

Lauren Bennett
Jimena Cruz
Kelly Heyer
Stephen Klimek
Rob Parsons
Molly Williams
Jane Winslow

Main issues

• Concerns about security along alleys
• Vehicular traffic problem
• Lack of alley identity

SEED® Performance Measures

• Changing the perception of the alley: number of residents surveyed before and after project implemented; qualitative results of post-evaluation
• Number of residents formed into Alley Committee [to continue project]
• Number of neighborhood residents who “green” their respective alley
• Number of “toolkits” distributed to residents

Brief

Through a series of interviews, residents of the Guadalupe neighborhood identified issues, challenges and assets associated with the alleyways. Common issues in the neighborhood included traffic speeding, parking by downtown visitors on weekends, a lack of neighborhood identity and continuity. Assets discovered included enthusiastic neighbors ready to tackle issues as well as the alley being a great place to stroll through the neighborhood and/or walk dogs. Through close involvement with alley residents and City of Austin staff, a design has been developed to address the stated concerns. A proposed alley address / garbage unit will aid in creating spatial organization for the alley, as well as creating a sense of identity and ownership.

Additionally, it will increase safety in the alley, as emergency vehicles will benefit from the address markers. Supergraphic pavement markings for the alley were created to act as traffic calming measures to allow for safer resident walking and biking, as well as being a unique way to give the alley further identity and character. Finally, the team prepared a toolkit handbook that the neighborhood stakeholders and the City of Austin may reference for ideas in developing future alley projects and identifying potential resources for such projects.

You can view the toolkit on the Center for Sustainable Development’s website.
The Alley Project began by leveraging the established relationship that the Center for Sustainable Development and the Alley Flat Initiative (AFI) have developed over time with the Guadalupe Neighborhood. This relationship was a critical first step in the project as students built upon the strong foundation of trust previously established through AFI projects. The Alley Project emerged from the common concerns and issues that residents shared regarding the alleys behind their homes. Because the residents voiced many of the same concerns, students saw the project as a way to bring residents together around a common cause and strengthen the sense of community among the stakeholders.

Students met with residents of the neighborhood to gather feedback on their designs. The residents were not merely asked for approval of a specific design proposal, but rather questioned about the design intent. For example, when presenting pavement markings, residents were asked not only what they thought of the actual graphic design, but also about how graphics could work as a traffic calming measure and place-making element. After students and residents discussed the design iterations, all participants agreed that more stakeholders should be sought out.

Students identified the City of Austin, the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation (GNDC) and the Austin Community Design and Development Center (ACDDC) as stakeholders in the future of Austin’s alleyway improvements. The organizations were contacted and meetings were scheduled. In these meetings, the stakeholders were interviewed about alley concerns and assets, in a manner much like the neighborhood resident meetings. Each stakeholder represented a different interest in the alleyways and thus contributed greatly to the understanding of present and future uses for the alleys. Upon collecting further input from these newly identified stakeholders, the students jumped back into the design process with the goal of incorporating design solutions for the alley based on the needs for multiple stakeholders. These newly crafted design proposals were shown once again to the stakeholders and constructive feedback received. After the students had performed several design iterations in response to stakeholder feedback and consensus was reached on client priorities. Then the construction process began. Mock-ups were built, installed in the alleyway, and left over one weekend so that residents could see what the proposed projects looked like and write down and comments that they might have. After confirming that the residents were happy with the final product ideas, students built and installed the final products in the alley.
The Alley team decided to focus their efforts on three design solutions for the alley: an address marker/garbage unit, alley pavement graphics and landscaped edge treatments. It was the consensus that these treatments provided the residents with solutions to the majority of their shared concerns.

The address marker/garbage unit addressed the issue of ownership and safety. The address panel of the structure is intended to replicate the common practice of address identification typically displayed on the front of the house. Providing the street address on the alley portrays the space as a cared for area with the intent of discouraging disrespectful activities. To increase visibility, the unit is outfitted with a solar light that illuminates the address numbers. Also, the markers will help emergency vehicles locate homes with greater ease when necessary. The structure will also provide a place for residents to store their garbage and recycling containers, providing spatial organization within the alley. Finally, the structure is intended to provide a traffic calming element as these units will act to visually narrow the driving surface and decrease vehicle speeds.
The pavement graphics were intended to give a unique community identity to the alley while also being a traffic calming element. The graphic flows east-west providing a visual prompt for drivers in an effort to encourage decreased vehicle speeds. Graphics were placed at the east and west entrances with the intention of alerting incoming drivers that they are entering a new kind of community space, where pedestrians are likely to be present, so driving speeds to be slowed. The graphics also act as a visual clue to draw in residents to make more use of the alleyways and increase their vitality.

The edge treatments, a direct response to a resident suggestion, provide continuity in the alley and present a sense of ownership. The edge treatments act to beautify the alley and give it that sense of being cared for in order to detract others from using the alley in negative ways. The edges were lined in limestone rock which is native to Central Texas and can be found throughout the Guadalupe neighborhood. The majority of the stones were donated for our use by one of the alley residents and the rest were purchased from a store that re-purposes construction materials.
Five Mile Farms Project
Growing Local Food and Economy

**Program**

Modular, mobile farm stand prototypes

**Team members**

Shelby Blessing  
Conner Bryan  
Alan Bush  
Kyle Engoian  
Tyler Harris  
Kaziah Haviland

Carrie Joynton  
Joe Junius  
Jason Minter  
John Paul Rysavy  
Michelle Strick

**Main issues**

- Education about food production and nutrition
- Community – building dialogue over farming
- Increased access to hyper-local produce
- Employment for people with limited opportunities
- Adaptable and replicable modular design

**SEED® Performance Measures**

- Times farmstand is used per month
- Amount of produce sold to residents and local restaurants per month
- Revenue generated from farmstands
- Number of farmstands reproduced throughout Austin
- Number of jobs provided through manning farmstands

**Brief**

Access to local and affordable organically grown produce is a challenge for many neighborhoods in Austin. Five Mile Farms (5MF) is a decentralized urban farm that transforms underutilized yard space throughout Austin into productive farmland that provides nourishment and builds community. A mobile farm stand, able to facilitate neighborhood produce sales in close proximity to each 5MF plot in the city, will minimize carbon emissions from food transport and improve access to hyper-local produce. The mobile farm stand will not only serve as a local landmark for the 5MF network where community members can gather to teach, learn, eat, shop, and build relationships, but also provide a raised awareness of the community through maps and diagrams and prompt discussion about local food sources, encouraging and empowering visitors to become part of Austin’s local food movement.
Five Mile Farms’ (5MF) mission is to provide hyper-local produce to the city of Austin and, in the process, build a sense of community. “Hyper-local” describes produce grown within a five mile radius of the consumer, and is readily accessible via low or zero carbon transportation methods. To that end, the 5MF design team created a prototype for a mobile farm stand in collaboration with urban farmer and 5MF founder Randy Jewart.

To define the project, the eleven members of the Five Mile Farms design team discussed needs and possible projects with Jewart. The team organized a list of priorities and values quoted directly from conversations with Jewart, paired with the projects he suggested, and the team determined that a farm stand would benefit 5MF as well as put the designers’ interests and expertise to their best use. In this exploration, the team also realized research through mapping, precedent studies, and diagramming would not only inform their design process, but also serve Five Mile Farms as a communication and advertising tool.

The team collectively decided that the farm stand needed to be a mobile, replicable, and an identifiable component of 5MF. Good shading also gained a high priority, especially after team members volunteered at the home farm one weekend in Austin’s sweltering summer heat.
The team developed a modular system using wood-framed panels of cattle fencing, conduit, concrete deck blocks, and burlap, the first iteration of which was completed after a week’s worth of construction. The entire stand and all its parts and produce can be towed in a small trailer. The team simultaneously devised a smaller, bikeable version that requires three small panels and a lightweight bike trailer bed. An additional bike stand, made of nesting boxes, was designed later for their final presentation.

The weekend before the end of the course, Jewart took the bike trailer out for a test run to a local restaurant and bar where he sells produce once a week. The zero-carbon transport was a hit, and visitors loved the team’s signage. Jewart had created a logo for 5MF, which the team lasercut into stencils and then painted onto boards and vegetable containers. The containers are reused plastic planters, easily stacked into milk crates for produce transport, and the crates serve as larger display boxes on site. The team found some soup ladles at their workshop that made for great reused sample display, too.

The team also tested the larger farm stand one weekend, with good results. Visitors enjoyed the bright orange burlap and hook system for produce display. After the initial test run, the team adjusted the final design by adding burlap panels on the side of the farm stand for additional shading from the sun.

Test run of the bikeable farm stand.
The final product was slightly modified in structure from the first, the major changes being intermediate footings for stability, additional burlap side panels, more produce display containers, corner shelves, cooler containers, and a sales/samples table that also caps the trailer and holds the entire operation in place for transport. The team edited, printed, and laminated maps and diagrams, which now go on display to raise awareness and prompt discussion about local food sources, encouraging and empowering visitors to become part of Austin’s local food movement.

Designed for replicability, each new farm stand will serve as a local landmark for the 5MF network where community members can gather to teach, learn, eat, shop, and build relationships.
A yard in the city is often times an underutilized resource that could be incorporated into a resident’s day-to-day activities, positively impacting their quality of life and increasing feelings of ownership, stewardship, belonging and engagement. This could be thought of as a “greening” of urban backyards through modular, customizable, SHED [+] systems. As the name suggests, the project begins with a core unit: the shed. Outdoor storage has been identified as a key need for Austin residents by individual homeowners, local property managers and low-income housing corporations. SHED [+] provides increased opportunities for property upkeep and safe storage, but the [+] implies something more, the shed and its components could be viewed as an educational tool, immediately available for Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation and their tenants, and potentially for the community at large. Add-ons such as vegetable beds, clotheslines, and a small chicken coop demonstrate how sustainable systems may be integrated with one another.
Process

The SHED (+) group was interested in creating a prototype structure that could be easily replicated by the Guadalupe Neighborhood Corporation (GNDC) and that would allow for a variety of programmatic functions.

The team connected with Roland, a local painter and resident of the neighborhood. Based upon their conversations with him, the team realized that Roland had a need and desire for storage space for his painting supplies. He typically stored his supplies on his front porch, taking up space that could otherwise be used for relaxing or socializing with his family. The team saw this as an opportunity to implement a design that supported Roland in both his work and home life.

The team discovered that Roland also owned two chickens who roamed free on his property. The chicken’s main roost was a tree in Roland’s yard that had to be cut down due to malnutrition, thus eliminating the chicken’s home. The students decided that a chicken coop would also be beneficial to Roland, so the team incorporated this into the design of the storage shed.

The main material used in the shed’s construction consisted of reused wooden pallets- a material easily found due to its high surplus from the manufacturing and shipping industry. The panels were constructed and sheathed with sanded acrylic panels serving as a rain screen.

The wood on the chicken coop portion of the project was burned with propane torches during construction to create an aesthetic juxtaposition to the white, acrylic-covered shed while also providing weatherproofing to the structure, adding to its longevity.

The team’s hope is that this project not only satisfies the pragmatic requirements of Roland’s job as a painter, but also adds to the beauty of his property and serves as an example of how a modular, easily replicable structure can be used elsewhere in the Guadalupe neighborhood.
The SHED (+) team handing over the project to Roland.
Heritage Fence Project
Neighborhood Placemaking + Preservation

Program
Heritage Fence
Public Seating / Gathering Area

Team members
Charles Amos Horn
Julie Huynh
Lindsey Jones
Jessi Koch
Michael Martin

Brief
The Guadalupe Neighborhood of East Austin has been home to multiple generations of Mexican Americans since the early 1900s when social and economic pressures led many African Americans and Mexican Americans east of today’s I-35 Highway. Gentrification has been an on-going reality for generational homeowners in the Guadalupe neighborhood since Austin’s 1997 Smart Growth Initiative. Restoring community character and improving public and private spaces within the neighborhood is imperative to the preservation of this historic neighborhood.

Issues
- Individual, tangible impact for a resident
- Respecting and celebrating memories of Place.
- Activating space between public & private
- History and identity as a driving force in design/communication.
- Providing a public impact through lighting, traffic calming, and interaction.
- Synthesize the individual with infrastructure
- The creation of a permeable barrier.

SEED® Performance Measures
- Post evaluation to measure qualitative response of client
- Number of times Alex uses space per month
- Number of community members who use public space / bench per month
Process

Alex Avila is the third generation of his family to live in the Guadalupe neighborhood of East Austin. Avila returned to live in the house his grandfather built because of the house’s potential as a repository of stories—past, present and future—for himself and the community. Alex’s desire resonated with the student participants of the PID course series. They took on a social and spatial dilemma to help him realize his desires: his backyard fence.

For the students, early time spent cleaning the fence line and organizing the scrap lumber Alex already possessed revealed the existing orders in the backyard. Alex expressed concerns for security, functionality, flexibility, and a welcoming atmosphere. As concepts developed, they were turned over to Alex. His feedback became concrete steps forward.

The existing chain-link fence contained a ten-foot wide gate for the occasional car and a narrow pedestrian gate. The team was excited by a scheme that allowed for a large public area just outside a new gate that could serve both vehicular and pedestrian purposes. However, when this approach was presented to Alex, he rejected it because of possible misuse by nearby bar patrons, and because it felt restrictive. In response, the team revamped an earlier arrangement involving a curved fence. They added a seating area along the old fence line to discourage parking.

Beginning with a fence that could do more than merely serve as a barrier, the design process with Alex led to a configuration he found comfortable and safe. New rough-sawn cedar lumber and steel agricultural wire paired with irregular salvaged materials speak to the piecemeal tradition of vernacular crafts and heritage of Alex’s house. The new ‘heritage’ fence and seating area mediates space between public and private. The removable panels and flexible connections can be adjusted as desired to allow the space to change, and the long bench can accommodate approximately 30 people.

The fence is set back from the alley right-of-way to expand the underutilized public space. Fencing materials remain visually open for the local residents: a welcoming experience for those walking the alley. Yet, the fence provides a necessary psychological barrier for Alex’s sense of security. There are other stakeholders who benefitted from the fence as well. Across from the Alex’s new fence, another homeowner lives in a house facing the alley. During the construction of the fence, the resident began to communicate how her family could also use the new space. She began to think of the project as an extension of her front yard.

The space has the potential to draw Alex’s family and others together during events. The
shaded bench provides a simple place to relax during cooler weather.

This expanded relationship along with city interest in developing strategies for greening alleyways has resulted in meaningful gathering spaces: public places that intertwine, embrace, and mobilize social interconnectivity. The on-going Avila family presence in the Guadalupe community helps preserve neighborhood history. Alex’s new fence creates public space from private. It offers an example of adaptive community space.
IN CONCLUSION
Where do we go from here?
At the conclusion of the five week program, the class toured each of the projects to check out the completed work. Teams described the process that they went through and the challenges they faced.

The four projects were complete successes; the stakeholders involved with each project were satisfied with the students’ hard work and the end result. The success of the projects has been positively recognized by the City of Austin. The newly formed Office of Sustainability, formed in September of 2010, is interested in using the projects as catalysts for future projects in Austin.

The composition of the Public Interest Design class integrated the knowledge and expertise of several disciplines such as architecture, landscape architecture, community and regional planning, urban design and geography. An awareness and understanding was developed among the students for the perspectives and priorities within and across disciplinary boundaries with mutual respect, admiration and sometimes, frustration. The opportunities and challenges presented in seminar discussion and onsite construction activities in the course series offered exciting possibilities for interdisciplinary service learning study and research related to both design and planning pedagogy and professional practice.

Our hope is that this program and the resultant projects, while small in scope and scale, are representative of a much larger movement of public interest design.
The class allowed me to reflect critically on the ethics of attempting to give voice to community perspectives in design processes.

The class empowered me to understand the roles I might best play in future community design projects.

The class helped me to understand the importance of building upon community assets in any public interest design project.

The class helped me understand the role that design can play in community activism.

The class helped me understand the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge production in the field of public interest design.

4.3 The class helped me learn about the roles of design in addressing issues of social justice.

4.3 The class helped me learn the importance of reflecting critically on my own perspective and the perspectives of others in order to form productive relationships with community partners.

4.7 The class helped me learn the importance of flexibility and adaptability in order to work productively with my group members, community members, city officials, and other stakeholders in design processes.

4.4 The class helped me learn to develop collaborative design skills that improved my engagement with various stakeholder groups.

4.6 The class helped me ascertain the methods I would like to employ in future community design work.
In Conclusion

Student Feedback

The students offered personal feedback about their experiences with the program. This list is only a small portion of it.

I loved the opportunity to interact with the public and other students in the practical realm. I got the opportunity to apply and prove the knowledge I have gained in my studies.

My favorite aspect of the program was the interdisciplinary group of students. I think that it helped me to understand other points of view and different perspectives of the same problem.

I enjoyed working directly with community members and city officials- engaging the public in the design process.

There’s nothing I would change about the course; everything was great in its own way.

I appreciated working within a group to achieve explicitly stated common goals. It really helped me see the most valuable roles I could play within a design team.

I enjoyed constructing the project with a diverse and talented team and an enthusiastic, engaged client.

The PID program was an amazing opportunity to begin to see how I might incorporate public interest design into my future architectural practice and to network with future leaders in the field.

This is a course that every student should have access to!