Summer Program: 2012

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CONTENTS
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- Barbara Brown Wilson
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- Steven Moore
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INTRODUCTION
The Case for Public Interest Design
Public Interest Design (PID) is an emergent movement of citizens, professionals, students, and academics that reflects a public appetite for design unmet by conventional design practice. Defined as a process through which service toward underserved communities shapes new practices, PID is rooted in the ethical responsibility to design for social and material change. Along with diverse partners, the Center for Sustainable Design at the University of Texas at Austin supports the cultivation of a new set of practices within the realm of architecture education.

Over the course of nine weeks, the UTPID program explored the intersection between service, social needs, and the production of the built environment. It approached this intersection from a theoretical and practical position and through three primary platforms. First, through a seminar that grounded PID in theory; second, through a toolbox of qualitative and quantitative methods for engaging communities and assessing projects; and third, through the construction of actual projects. The 2012 PID program also offered an externship opportunity in San Francisco, in which students conducted post-occupancy evaluation of built projects serving the public interest.

The seminar and practicum components were led by Steven Moore and Cisco Gomes of the University of Texas School of Architecture, complemented by lectures from leading professionals in the field such as David Perkes, Bryan Bell, John Peterson, and Jess Zimbabwe. From an initial Community Partner Presentation, the Holly Neighborhood and West Austin Park were chosen as the two program sites. The interplay between theory and practice applied to particular sites played a significant role in shaping the built outcomes of the summer 2012 PID program.

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 2012 UTPID 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 underserved communities. Third, it provided students interested in PID with a venue to connect with other like-minded students across the nation and world.
THE TEAM
The Students Who Were Involved
In 2012, seventeen students from across the country came together for the second Public Interest Design Summer Course Series.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Texas at Austin</th>
<th>K. Alexandra Krippner</th>
<th>Architecture</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Allison Forman</td>
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<td>Elizabeth de Regt</td>
<td>Sustainable Design</td>
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<td>Jena Hammond</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
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<td>Kristina Olivent</td>
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<td>Laura Edwards</td>
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<td>Shelley McDavid</td>
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<tr>
<th>City of Austin</th>
<th>Heydn Ericson</th>
<th>Planning</th>
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<tr>
<th>Cornell University</th>
<th>Gilad Meron</th>
<th>Design and Environmental Analysis</th>
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<th>Pacific Northwest College of Art</th>
<th>Katie Mays</th>
<th>Collaborative Design</th>
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<th>Tulane University</th>
<th>Dorothy Shepard</th>
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AUSTIN, TEXAS
Public Interest Design Curriculum
Seminar + Practicum
May 31 – July 24, 2012

Program Overview

The Austin portion of the PID program was comprised of two primary curricular elements: a research-based seminar and a service-oriented practicum. These elements were augmented by a series of community-engagement events throughout the Austin area.

The PID Program connects advanced students with leaders in architecture and public service and creates an atmosphere of inspired collaboration. Student teams approach community needs with novel strategies. The problems to be solved are unique to Austin, though the lessons learned could be applied anywhere. Group discussions emphasize constructive criticism of the assumptions behind public design. In the practicum, students learn that the process of community engagement and creation is as important as a quality product. Class discussions frequently return to evaluations of project intention and reception relative to the ethics of community design. Weekly guests empower students by introducing new business models for design professionals.

This year, students from Cornell, Tulane, and the Pacific Northwest College of Art joined architecture, design, and planning students from the University of Texas at Austin, turning the Austin campus into a hub of interdisciplinary collaboration where the methods and goals of public interest design were rigorously expanded.

At the conclusion of the seminar, half of the students departed for San Francisco, where they employed newly-minted research strategies to conduct post-occupancy evaluations of recently completed projects with the guidance of Public Architecture.

Seminar

Dr. Steven Moore led the seminar course, during which students gained an understanding of how to evaluate, analyze, and integrate public design theory and practice.

Community Engagement

A series of Austin-area events allowed students the opportunity to meet potential clients, connect with local communities, and gain familiarity with fabrication resources.

Practicum

Assistant Professor Francisco Gomes led the practicum course, during which students designed and fabricated projects selected during the seminar portion of the program.
## Program Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Tour:</th>
<th>Local Partners</th>
<th>Students arrive in Austin for presentations by potential local partners.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Guest:</td>
<td>David Perkes</td>
<td>David Perkes joins the class. Students form design + build teams and select projects.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion:</td>
<td>Civic Environmentalism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tour:</td>
<td>Local Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Guest:</td>
<td>Bryan Bell Amalia Leifeste</td>
<td>Design pinups with Bryan Bell refine ideas while the class discusses differences between project intention and reception.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion:</td>
<td>Intention + Reception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Guest:</td>
<td>John Peterson</td>
<td>John Peterson and Professor Steven Moore examine the past and the future of the design profession.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion:</td>
<td>Coding the Future &amp; Branching Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
<td>Community Engagement Design Development</td>
<td>Students gain feedback from community partners and develop initial designs.</td>
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<td>Discussion:</td>
<td>Building Culture</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
<td>Design Finalization Construction Begins</td>
<td>Designs reach a level of completion from which construction can begin. Students regularly work on-site.</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
<td>Construction Continues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Activities:</td>
<td>Construction Continues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Construction Ends Robert Hanna Jess Zimbabwe Jessica Shortall</td>
<td>Students prepare for final presentation of built work, completing construction and reflecting on their work over 9 weeks. Guest speakers address career paths.</td>
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</tbody>
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Francisco Gomes

Cisco Gomes founded his award-winning practice, Gomes+Staub Architects, with partner Dabney Staub in 1999. The work of Gomes+Staub has been published nationally and internationally, notably in *1000x Architecture of the Americas*. The firm’s work has been presented in a number of lectures and exhibitions, including the Duke University Museum of Art and the Audi International exhibition in Hanover, Germany. In 2008, Cisco joined the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture faculty, where he teaches design and construction.

Cisco has actively practiced as a registered architect since 1996 and has held licenses in the states of Texas, North Carolina, Connecticut, and Virginia. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, a LEED accredited professional, a CSI Certified Construction Specifier, and a licensed commercial building contractor in the State of North Carolina.

Cisco has been recognized for his teaching with the School of Architecture Outstanding Studio Teacher Award (2009), the Texas Exes Teaching Award (2011), membership in the UT Society for Teaching Excellence (2011), and the UT Board of Regents’ Outstanding Teaching Award (2012).

Steven Moore

Steven A. 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 is currently working on a new book, *Questioning Architectural Judgment: The Problem with Codes in the United States*.

Teaching Assistant

Kat Phillips

Teaching Assistant

Kyle Engoian
Guest Lecturers

David Perkes
Principal,
Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Bryan Bell
Principal, Design Corps

John Peterson
Principal, Public Architecture

Amalia Leifeste
Post-profesional Master of Architecture,
UTSOA 2012

Jess Zimbabwe
Executive Director of the Rose Center,
Urban Land Institute

Rob Hanna
RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service

Jessica Shortall
Director of Giving, TOMS Shoes
Preface to the Seminar

“And so it is with mathematical knowledge, or with knowledge of politics or art. Their respective objects are not known till they are made in course of the process of experimental thinking. Their usefulness when made is whatever, from infinity to zero, experience may subsequently determine it to be.”


The nine weeks of the 2012 Public Interest Design summer program was an “experiment” of the kind imagined by John Dewey in the passage above. Although 2012 was the second-year of the program, the expansion of our collaboration with Public Architecture in San Francisco gave the program a new analytic dimension. As in the first year, one group of students engaged with selected Austin neighborhoods to define a problem, physically construct a response to the problem, and finally reflect on the efficacy of the design/build process. That action-oriented thinking certainly required the kind of experimental thinking Dewey advocates.

Unlike in the first year, however, a second group of students embarked to San Francisco for two-weeks to conduct post-occupancy analysis of five recently completed projects, all of which made claim to advancing public interest. On the surface, this kind of after-the-fact analytic thinking sounds more like tradition science conducted at a distance. Yet these students too found themselves deeply engaged with individuals who had conflicting memories about how the project came to be and how it serves affected groups. Their experience of the cases studied, through real people, required no less experimental thinking in the reconstruction of how the intentions of one group are received and lived by others.

We have not yet finalized the design of PID 2013, but it is unlikely that we will get too far from these rich experiments that examine how architecture can be “useful” to real people.

Steven Moore, 2012
What is Public Interest Design?

Students wrote weekly journals to synthesize opinions on reading and class discussion, and to document how readings applied to the design and construction of community projects.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is hot now in the design world. One needs to look no further than Austin’s own international design competition for Waller Creek. Just about every team selected for the first round of fifteen semi-finalists explicitly included a partner to manage and oversee community engagement. Its popularity suggests a de facto acceptance of its merit; however, it is worth looking critically at the problems with community engagement as well as why and how it should be utilized.

If you believe that architecture is all about making beautiful spaces, then the idea that the public should have a say in the design of a building is quite problematic. Someone from this (what I will call traditional) stance may argue that by and large the input will be given by people with no professional training in design, and therefore their input will only muddle, slow down, and potentially derail the design process. Secondly, the beauty of spaces is best judged by trained experts, not by your average citizen. Not only does the community not know how to design beautiful spaces, but they often only experience their positive effects subconsciously, and do not have the developed perception to engage in an intelligent critique of the aesthetics of spaces.

I have presented this side as exaggeratedly big-brotherish; however, these criticisms of community engagement should be taken seriously, and in my opinion, hold some important truths. However, I optimistically argue that the idea of architecture primarily as art, to be judged by experts, is old and outdated and in the process of being replaced by a more integrated approach that places primacy on performance. In this view, aesthetics is still crucially important—insofar as it effects people’s experience. The true measure of a building is how well it serves its place and people; this includes its technical performance, its social impact, economic impact, and experiential/phenomenological impact. In this performative view, information is a designer’s most valuable tool, and community engagement is an essential method of harvesting valuable information.

Civic Environmentalism

Narrow-focus Civic Environmentalism stresses the interconnected and place-based nature of environmental problems that we face today. However, solutions to these environmental problems are usually seen as disconnected from local social, economic, or political problems. Often those looking through the narrow lens of Civic Environmentalism see technological strategies as the most effective solution to the problems at hand, and while they may interact with the public, it is only to inform them of the
best practices that have been established for addressing local environmental issues.

On the other hand, broadly focused Civic Environmentalism approaches environmental problems as one contributing element in complex urban ecological systems which are inherently linked to issues of social inequity within the local community.

They describe environmental and economic instability as the symptoms of urban problems because these are the processes in the larger urban ecosystem that tend to be more visible/tangible to all members of the local community. And, because economic and environmental problems are felt by a larger percentage of the community, these are the issues that generally get the most attention. However, the authors argue that these are just the symptoms of urban ecological instability, whereas the underlying cause is social injustice. We should direct our efforts towards correcting social inequity in order to create a functioning community, rather than bandaging the problem, thereby controlling the symptoms while ignoring the disease.

This strategy involves the creation of systems for collecting and managing public feedback on issues of community development. The way to ensure public participation that moves beyond standard procedures to provide meaningful input is through establishing a sense of responsibility to participate rather than simply acknowledging their right to participate. Establishing accountability encourages community members to participate in meaningful ways that can lead to lasting change through ongoing civic involvement in the solutions proposed.

In the spirit of pragmatism, I began to break down the West Austin Park project. First looking at how the scope of this design-build activity fits into the larger plan that the City has, and then looking at how to fill in the gap between the current conditions and the preferred ones with a process that will be helpful both to the residents of this particular neighborhood and for the City as they continue to expand this program to other parks.

The residents and the City together recognized inadequate conditions in the parks because of lost canopy cover due to the recent drought. The City has devised a potential solution to this problem to improve park conditions: using reclaimed water to save unhealthy trees and help newly planted trees grow. Their proposed system fits well within the current infrastructure and takes advantage of materials readily available. However, they acknowledge that there are issues with integrating the system into the context of the West Austin landscape and community identity. This is the point in which we can insert ourselves to bring the project to life. We can help bridge the gap not only between the planning and implementation of the cistern at West Austin Park, but also between the infrastructural concept and a change to infrastructure city-wide.”
Methods for Assessment

Shelley McDavid

The importance of “process” over “product” is particularly relevant to our approach to the prototype aspect of this project. Rather than proposing an end product that can be replicated at any park, we are proposing an end process that can be adapted to varying park contexts, recognizing that our design will not necessarily be appropriate for any site. We are also attempting to consider not simply our structure as an isolated entity but as a part of and influencing other systems like the ecology of the park and the social value to the neighborhood.

The West Austin Park is neither biocentric nor anthropocentric in focus. Rather, it attempts to strike a balance between the two, emerging to save the trees but aiming to do so with the community in mind. Assessment of the project is definitely more reliant on the type of techniques Cole characterizes as “method” rather than “tool.” We cannot emphasize accuracy or precision but rather should focus on the degree to which we can engender social action—this to us is an important part of how we determine success in the project. Yet as understood from class discussion, it is still necessary to be able to make reasonable projections as to what will and will not work, and to this end, I think more precise, quantifiable measurements achieved through what Cole defines as “tools” are needed. In the future, measurements of how much reclaimed water is used and thus kept out of our rivers and of how many trees are saved will be useful indicators of success. The difficulty arises however when trying to make more qualitative measurements of social, political, and economic impact. It is difficult to determine how the cistern and our structure encompassing it will affect the community. This could be done with post-installation interviews of park users and neighbors, observation of the space (hopefully) in use, and maybe a step further from our cistern structure project itself, measurements of how many people are newly involved in community decisions and meetings concerning the park and the neighborhood. It is difficult to know what to measure and how when evaluating social and political impacts. The process requires a different methodology than assessing environmental impacts, which I think is part of the reason why many current building assessment methods and tools are limited in scope. Hopefully recognition of the need to evaluate not only environmental but also social and political impact can lead us to do so usefully if not entirely accurately or precisely.

The Role of the Architect

Elizabeth De Regt

Though we as architecture students have heard the historical trends in architecture repeated over and over, we do not generally hear them explained through the lens of civic or public interest design. I think about this regularly as I try to describe my own interests in architecture. In an attempt to define my future role, I have come to search for the parts of an architect’s typical role that I dislike. For instance, I have long felt that today’s architects are far too disconnected from the final
product of their design. In reading books like *Brunelleschi’s Dome*, thereby gaining a picture of what ancient architects’ roles, I have found myself aligning with a viewpoint of a more active form of architecture—becoming more directly involved in the design process throughout pre-design all the way to completion of construction.

I looked at the splintering aspects of the original architect, or master-builder role, and found that perhaps it has gone too far. David Brain argues a similar point through a historical study of architects. Today, he describes a world where architects may no longer be needed and claims that “architecture operates on terrain that can be easily contested.” While architects may argue that the program and social analysis and aesthetics an architect (rather than a builder) contributes to a project make their services worthwhile, others consider them to be unnecessary.

The nonprofit firm Public Architecture promotes a different role for architects, one where the firm actively seeks out clients, develops design solution, and acquires funding from grants or government agencies. Public Architecture’s pro bono model puts architects and clients together in a more collaborative relationship that allows for experimentation and the development of novel design solutions. Pro bono work can be a way for architects to explore a role as social advocates, and to explore and test new methods for design and building.

**Pro-Bono**

John Peterson of the non-profit firm Public Architecture sees the role of designers as one that engages in responsive design. This means designers should be going out into the world and finding problems to solve instead of creating things for corporations and elite individuals. I find responsive design to be a broad term with the same goal in mind: to help others. Responsive design is a way to design interactions. Sometimes designers can even come up with social systems that can change the way we view things today.

Public Architecture’s 1% program asks large firms to team up with non-profit organizations. This simple idea of asking firms to dedicate 1% of their profits, designers, and time towards helping a non-profit can lead to bigger social changes. This program hopes to make firms see the value in creating architecture for clients with the greatest need. The design freedom and challenges they may experience also lures designers into this field. In addition, if there is any rift between the disciplines of architecture and design, they can be explored in a pro bono setting to make better connections within the industry and to the world beyond.
Seminar Bibliography

http://www.seednetwork.org/

Agyeman, Julian and Briony Angus. “The Role of Civic Environmentalism in the Pursuit of Sustainable Communities.” In Journal of Environmental Planning and Management vol. 46, no. 3 [2003]: 345-363.


The Austin program commenced with a Community Partner Presentation during which students familiarized themselves with a short-list of clients and projects, including:

- Holly Gardens
- West Austin Park
- Bastrop Fire Recovery Plan
- Five Mile Farms
- South Shores Central
- UT Concho Garden

This presentation was followed by a series of events promoting engagement with community members and institutions. By touring socially active local businesses, students witnessed the importance of integrating community inputs in built works. The site visits and client interviews gave students the opportunity to discover the values embedded in each project, an exercise that would also help affirm the goals of each project team.

The ideal project would be selected not only for its programmatic necessity but for its interaction with a number of other architectural factors including scale, materiality, building culture, replicability, stewardship, and siting. Through the process of client interviews, site visits, and internal discussions, students matched their goals with the potential projects, eventually self-organizing into two teams.

Based on these criteria, students identified the Holly Gardens and West Austin Park projects as the best options for the PID program’s goals.

- 05.31 Community Partner Presentation
  Austin, TX
  Goldsmith Hall
- 06.01 Community Partner Project Tour
  Austin, TX
- 06.08 Food + Fabrication Tour
  Austin, TX
The Holly neighborhood of Austin is another site that is on the verge of change. The power plant is about to be taken down and replaced with shops and is a source of contention for the community, increasing concerns of gentrification in the area. This is a community that needs help in coming together and moving forward with the changes that are about to occur in a positive way. PID students should be present as a positive influence in these discussions, generating ideas on how to help this neighborhood. The design build project should serve as a kickstarter for the neighborhood, something that could be built upon by members of the community after the PID semester is finished. The mobile tool shed could work in this way, with PID students getting it off the ground and then allowing the community itself to continue the work, strengthening the neighborhood along the way.
Professor Stephen Ross led the Public Interest Design participants on the first part of the Austin tour. Students had the opportunity to meet with organizations addressing the issue of local food production, and they considered how they might take similar approaches in addressing community needs.

**Johnson’s Backyard Garden**  
3608 River Road  
Cedar Creek, TX 78612

**Sustain Center**  
443 Bastrop Highway  
Austin, TX 78741

**Rain Lily Farm**  
914 Shady Lane  
Austin, TX 78702

**Springdale Farm**  
755 Springdale Road  
Austin, TX 78702
Fabrication Tour

The tour continued in the afternoon with visits to local fabrication shops and artists, and finally to the Blackland community just east of the University of Texas at Austin. This gave students a chance to begin thinking about how their eventual practicum projects might be implemented.

SOL/KRDB
1127 Perry Road
Austin, TX 78721

RAD Furniture
618c Tillery Street
Austin, TX 78702

Hatch Workshop/Red Swing Project
618 Tillery Street
Austin, TX 78702

Blackland Community Development Corp.
1902 East 22nd Street
Austin, TX 78722
What is the role of a practicum in the education of designers interested in furthering the public interest? While the design-build project remains the dominant model used in design education to help students engage social concerns in the built environment, it is improbable that this is the only way of effectively teaching how to design for the common good. Like any realized project, the buildings of the practicum students in this program were shaped by the power of financial sponsorship, individual voices and interests, and material circumstances in addition to the ethical obligations the students had to the larger community and the public as a whole. So the question remains: Why is design-build so pervasive in public interest teaching; or to ask the same question a different way, why is it good (or at least worthwhile)?

The name of the course is a mouthful: Public Interest Design Practicum. But if one boils down the title and distills away the qualifiers one possible answer to the question emerges. The course is, at its core, a practicum, and its agency as an exercise of practical physical work performed in the world outside the university is exactly what makes it useful in teaching both design and ethical methods. Without a doubt, good design demands skills from representation to formal composition to digital simulation—skills that can be taught through design problems both abstract and distanced from the world around us as well as those fully embedded in the circumstances of humanity and the environment. However, intentional work also requires skilled judgment and the development of a system of values; these are the arguably more foundational conditions of design activity that are difficult to learn in the abstract. Architectural problems are complex and solutions can’t equally attend to every aspect for which they are ultimately responsible. The ability to exercise judgment and identify a set of values underlying a project is what allows the designer to augment questions of technique (the “how”) with questions of worth (the “why”). What is architecture for?

There is another aspect of qualification relevant to the design-build teaching of the PID practicum. As our society extends the formal education of our young adults by demanding ever more degrees and qualifications, students have an understandable impatience to exert agency in the world they live in. After all, the dominant mantra for the economic superstars of our era, those producers of internet apps and social media who all seem to have dropped out of our universities because we were a distraction from doing relevant work, is “issue early, issue often.” In this world, relevance and influence are not rewards that come in recognition for individual qualification or the production of a good piece of work; relevance and influence are instead the method of making the work good.

We all want to be relevant and our universities have an obligation to nurture and educate but not to shelter. We must find ways of allowing
our students to engage the world not just as general citizens but as designers advising and guiding real actions in the physical world—fully qualified or not. It is not a process that is always smooth, predictable, or even particularly reassuring for either the communities or the students themselves, but what makes it good and worthwhile is that it empowers social and professional relevance for our students. With relevance comes engagement, and with engagement comes accelerated learning, the production of new knowledge, and perhaps even a bit of wisdom.

Cisco Gomes, 2012

Practicum Bibliography


The practicum began in earnest during the fourth week of the program. Though students had selected projects and self-organized into two teams earlier in the semester, this was the first time for them to devote their full attention to design. The practicum began with a tools and safety lecture followed by a material connection study designed to transition students into the mindset of making.

Following the introductory exercises both teams reached out to their community partners, evaluating needs and gaining feedback on early concepts. The teams engaged in a series of presentations and critiques, rapidly developing their schematic designs. Both teams pushed to begin building as soon as possible, realizing that fabrication would necessitate a whole set of unforeseeable design decisions. In the end the built works were informed by a range of influences, synthesizing community input, design concept, and constructional realities.

In addition to the design|build exercises, students engaged in discussions based on a series of texts curated by Professor Francisco Gomes. Discussions reflected on the relationship between practice and theory, which developed a foundation from which students could base their decision-making and value systems.
Material Field Trip + Connection Study

Practicum students traveled to San Marcos, Texas, to scavenge materials at the Green Guy Recycling facility. Professor Gomes asked students to select materials from the salvage yard and create non-functional compositions using non-adhesive based connections. The task encouraged students to critically think about the physical implications of their material choices and methods of making.

The material investigations led to a wide array of built works. Some connections were made using the inherent geometries of scavenged objects while others featured a series of objects bound together with a secondary set of materials.

The exercise proved to be worthwhile preparation for students as both teams elected to incorporate reclaimed materials in their projects. The choice to do so can be seen as a cost-saving measure as well as a method of imbuing a seasoned material character.
Recent years have witnessed significant changes as issues around gentrification have affected original social and spatial conditions of the Holly Street neighborhood. In response, the primary purpose of the Holly Street project was to develop a community design process that would bring the diverse members of the Holly Street neighborhood together around common interests. Building off of an initial idea to construct a shared tool shed for home repair, the team learned from community meetings and informal conversations that gardening is a common activity among residents. The project, then, developed a network of gardens built by community and team members, and a community designed and team built mobile garden shed.

The Holly Street project is relevant because it cultivated a new process of engagement and a project from the existing practice of gardening. The project is relevant for the field of planning because it links knowledge to action and for architecture because it re-frames the design process from the perspective of real community interests and needs.
Holly Neighborhood is located in East Austin, bounded by Chicon St., E 7th St., N. Pleasant Valley Rd., and Lady Bird Lake. The neighborhood has experienced profound changes over the past several years evidenced by rapid gentrification and the closing of the Holly Street Power Plant. Residents of Holly Neighborhood are understandably wary of newcomers, yet they are also aware of the necessity of community building.

The team sought to build a physical object that would help to build community in Holly Neighborhood, bringing neighbors together in improving their common surroundings and creating an environment that encourages friendly interaction and support. Early ideas centered on facilitating home repair, but developed further as team members gathered input from Holly Neighborhood residents.

“*The design of the social process that will facilitate the gardening efforts is as important as the built product in order to have a lasting result.*”

Laura Edwards

Note: Quotes used throughout the practicum section are taken directly from team members’ weekly journals.
Recognizing the need for community engagement in the design process, the Holly Gardens team sought out opportunities to consult local residents whenever possible. Taking cues from their interactions with citizens as well as community organizations, the team developed its project around community interest in gardening. A mobile gardening toolshed was designed so community members could build gardens at their own homes. By developing a project rooted in community interest, the team hoped that community ownership would extend the life of the project far beyond the duration of the summer PID session.

"After getting the survey results from this past weekend, it is apparent that most people surveyed are interested in gardening. This changed our perspective and shifted the project from a tool shed to a gardening shed."

Jena Hammond

"Feedback and interaction has created a collection of values and goals that are important to the community. These values will become our design intents and later can be used as a place-based assessment method to evaluate the project’s successes and shortcoming."

Laura Edwards
Week 06 began with design finalization and construction details. The team drew a full-size mock-up in tape to manipulate the trailer’s proportions. The depth of each compartment was finalized based on appropriate reaching lengths and tool sizes. The team then began construction details, working out the order of construction and material quantities through these drawings. These details have been refined as construction has progressed.

On Tuesday, the team visited lumber yards and other businesses in Holly Neighborhood to acquire tools, materials or monetary donations. These efforts were fruitless in terms of materials and money, but it led us to Austin Lumber Co. who offered a workspace instead (with electricity and shade!). This donation has proven to be very valuable!

**Design Development**

Having gathered key information from community members, the Holly Neighborhood team went back to the drawing board. They built models, made drawings and diagrams, discussed their project amongst themselves, and participated in pinups with PID instructors and fellow students. With their newly solidified project goals, the team rapidly developed a design for a mobile gardening shed as well as a plan to effect change beyond the built object.

“We decided that the important and needed components of the trailer were: to have a space for seating and making this a place not just a tool shed, to have a planter bed for either succulents or storing shared plants and seedlings, and to have intuitive compartments that help show the function of the cart and where its materials are stored.”

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*Eden Lew*
The team designed the gardening tool shed to be grafted onto an existing trailer, creating a mobile tool shed that could travel around Holly Neighborhood for use by all community residents. Rather than design it as a typical trailer tool shed, storage was broken into several compartments corresponding to the size and shape of the tools within, facilitating ease of use. The shed consisted of three main components: storage for long tools, short tools, and flex space. The teams explored several options for how to best configure each component. For example, long tools could be stored vertically in a tall compartment or horizontally in a shorter compartment. Short tool storage was designed to take advantage of repurposed Coca Cola crates. Flex space options included empty uncovered spaces, empty spaces shaded by an extended roof, seating, and enclosed cubby storage. The design also incorporated a planter bed to demonstrate gardening and communicate immediately the purpose of the tool shed.

As the design developed, the three discrete components were unified into a single butterfly roofed structure with three “tool zones.” The team determined that a single, unique profile would be a more recognizable symbol for the Holly Gardens network than a set of discrete compartments. The use of a butterfly roof allowed for variation in height of storage areas for different tools.

The design was documented during the fifth week of the PID program through a series of construction drawings, diagrams, and renderings. Shown here are elements of the team’s presentation for the Fiesta Gardens Veteran’s Festival.
Fabrication

For three intense weeks, the Holly Neighborhood team transformed their design into physical form. Key to moving forward was the purchase of a used boat trailer from which construction drawings could be based. The team began fabrication by stripping the trailer of its unnecessary parts, removing rotting wood, and grinding rusted bolts off the frame. The trailer was sanded and repainted in preparation for reuse.

The initial worksite was adjacent to one of the team member’s homes, causing a stir among neighbors. The team worked briefly in the lot of the East Side Food Park following an invite from the owner. Though the site turned out only to be a temporary fix, an afternoon of requesting donations from local businesses brought the team to the Austin Lumber Company, whose owner graciously offered her facilities as a worksite. This supplied the Holly Neighborhood team with power, shade, water, and restrooms for the remaining two weeks.
of the plants, the plants are about creating a designing about watershed, and the watering trailer, even if they are in planters. Instead of that we definitely want to have plants on the place, and provide education. We decided to be distinctive, represent a network, create our priorities for the trailer are for it morning about our preliminary design, we laid out our social priorities for the garden agaves on the trailer. After our discussion with Cisco this went over to Maria Gonzalez' house at 2402 W Second St. to survey her yard. She lives in a town home-type building with a small, shaded front yard. She wants the current ivy in the base, and took out several bolts. We used the grinder to grind off half of the connections of East Side Food Park, if we could temporarily into a junkyard and that I needed to review neighbor complained that this was turning to the rails. We only got halfway when a just to clean it up. We removed the plywood decided to work on it there. Our first step is we moved it to my apartment on Tuesday, and Today, we got to the point where (if up giving up for the day. plywood. We ran out of wood and ended an intersecting interior frame piece and wood. At 3:30 PM, we found a problem in order to correctly cut angles in the piece that we used to square the frame of the butterfly roof. In order to fix that with the connection at the meeting point with the handy tools we used was a triangle we would need to connect the pieces to we would have to return the trailer jack and were unable to find the correct type of jack that the trailer jack we purchased from Harbor Freight Tools did not fit the metal frame of the trailer. Laura and the other guys that the trailer jack we purchased from Co. did not have untreated 2"x4" pieces for us to use and buy. We also realized that the trailer jack we purchased from that they offered us, most of which has to be used on printing was not what we were lead to expect.

We also attended the second Holly Neighborhood Coalition meeting to update them on the trailer. They seem happy with our progress, but confirmed the small donations and information. The guy we spoke with was very informative and gave us advice for what kinds of plants would thrive right now and how to remove the yucca and agave for what kinds of plants would thrive right now, and then leave in the trailer for the whole yucca removed, and replaced with the larger agave plant, she just wants cleaned up and all of the smaller sprouts taken away. She wants dealt with, a quite large agave plant with flowers. There are two succulent plants near the house to be dug up, and replaced with new ones. The large agave plant, she just wants cleaned up and all of the smaller sprouts taken away. She wants dealt with, a quite large agave plant with flowers. There are two succulent plants near the house to be dug up, and replaced with new ones.

teri, an active member of Holly Neighbors Parade Festival. Natalie and I met up with volunteers on Saturday at the Fourth of July Fourth of July and spent the day helping out. We were able to make a lot of progress on the trailer. We also checked out prices and future use.

While the others bought the lumber for the base and moved the trailer, I updated our details from yesterday to incorporate the changes we decided on this morning (and yesterday afternoon). The new drawings follow.
Sheathing

The tool shed is constructed in several layers: the frame, the “inner box,” the “outer box,” and the cladding. The “inner box” performs in shear and stiffens the shed. It is also the water barrier (the team used a liquid water sealant). The “outer box” includes a secondary layer of plywood which accommodates the various doors and provides a substrate for the cladding. The donation of plywood from East Side Lumber Yard was instrumental in this stage of fabrication.

Framing

The tool shed uses a pier and beam foundation, bolted on to the top of the trailer’s steel frame. 2x8s wrap the foundation, visually unifying the four sides of the shed, each of which has a unique architectural condition. The inexpensive pine lumber framing structures the various compartments, including storage for tools of various sizes, a sitting area, and a garden bed. The particular angle of the butterfly roof proved a challenge throughout the build, though attention to craft from an early stage made the quality of the overall resolution possible.
**Roofing**

Purlins and sheets of plywood frame the butterfly roof of the tool shed. The metal for the roofing was the Holly Neighborhood team’s second major donation. Ja-Mar Roofing generously donated the metal as well as the labor for installation. The nature of a single, bent sheet of metal means the particular angle of the butterfly roof could be achieved while still preventing water infiltration in the valley. The shape of the roof references water catchment and provides occasional watering of the planter bed.

**Cladding**

The weathered-wood cladding of the tool shed was one of the most important aesthetic decisions made during the build. It was also the third major donation received by the team: a gift from the Austin Lumber Company. Though the tool shed is rather small, team members were very excited to see their vision of a distinctive symbol of the Holly Garden network take form.
From an early stage in the design process the Holly Gardens team decided that their project should attempt to create social change in the Holly Neighborhood. For this reason they paired their construction with a series of garden-building exercises. The gardens not only provided context and meaning for the tool shed, they allowed the team to make an immediate impact in the community. Community members have increasingly felt let down by outsiders who come in and make big promises but fail to follow through. This was a way for the team to express their commitment to the project. In addition it created an informal environment for interaction that could not be replicated in a community meeting. The team built a garden each of the three final weekends of the program, allowing them an opportunity to converse with community members about the project and begin to seek out those interested in building their own garden.

Once completed, the team organized a ceremonial handing-off of the project to its new owners, the Holly Neighborhood Coalition. Members of the Coalition, along with other community contacts developed throughout the process, were invited to its temporary site at the East Side Food Park. The event brought out various members of the neighborhood. The team was able to introduce the project and its features to the group, while fielding their questions and discussing where the garden shed would move. In addition, the attendees were asked to contribute project name ideas. The thought was that if the neighborhood could name the project themselves, it would further the sense of ownership of the project. An official meeting was held at a later date, with the final name becoming “East Side Garden Exchange.” To conclude the event, the team broke a miniature bottle of champagne on the former boat-trailer-turned-mobile-gardening-tool-shed.

“We realized that a huge aspect of our project would be creating a core group of people to maintain a system of building and planting gardens, one at a time, for their neighbors. In order to create this system, we decided that the completion of a few gardens this summer to entrench the program a bit would be a good addition to our project.”

Elizabeth de Regt
West Austin Park
Cistern Enclosure

Program

Reclaimed Water Cistern
Cistern Enclosure
Seating
Community Board

Team Members

Claire Edelen
Allison Forman
Kristina Olivent
Drew Wilson

Main Issues

- Responding to drought by supporting trees with reclaimed water
- Retaining aesthetic integrity of neighborhood
- Educating community residents about the role of reclaimed water

Brief

Like other parks under the purview of the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, vegetation in the West Austin Park has suffered from increasing levels of drought. One of the solutions proposed for parks like the West Austin Park is the distribution of cisterns supplied by greywater trucked-in from other locations. As a “standard” system, the problem becomes how each cistern adapts to the unique characteristics of Austin’s diverse parks and their corresponding neighborhoods. The PID practicum team addressed this issue by setting up shop in the park to solicit knowledge from community members and attending community social events for more informal conversation about the neighborhood. From this field research, the team developed a series of designs that underwent community scrutiny and revision before deciding on a buildable solution.

The West Austin Park project is relevant because it considered the issue of water distribution at different scales and through the often divided lenses of practicality, aesthetics, and community engagement. The project serves as a prototype for how the implementation of cisterns across Austin might exist as a platform for developing community engagement processes around environmental concern of drought and water acquisition.
West Austin Park is located in the middle of historic Clarksville between W. 9th Street and W. 10th Street. It is a frequently used public amenity offering a dog park, swimming pool, and playground in addition to its picturesque, rolling landscape. A large stand of cedar-elms on the east side of the park have been dying from drought conditions in recent years. The City of Austin has offered to deliver reclaimed water for irrigation, however, community members were apprehensive about the impact of a cistern on the beauty of the park. The project addressed these concerns while providing an amenity and educational feature for the park.

“At the University of Texas School of Architecture, we have been trained to be experts. During this summer’s PID practicum, we will also learn how to tap into the rich reservoir of collective experience accumulated by the residents of Austin’s Clarksville neighborhood. This will partly be achieved by our self-conscious interaction with the landscape itself as well as by our sensitivity to the beliefs, customs, values, politics, and prejudices of the people who have a vested interest in that landscape.”

Kristina Olivent
Intent on engaging community partners throughout the design process, the West Austin Park team found many ways of interacting with stakeholders. In the third week of the program, the team set up shop near the centrally located poolhouse in order to survey local citizens about their concerns and considerations regarding the process. Team members also attended neighborhood social events seeking a less formal occasion for understanding attitudes. The team also worked with partners in forestry, parks, water, and sanitation to ensure that the project developed would serve the park landscape in addition to the interests of the neighborhood residents.

Moving forward from the public surveys, team members began developing design concepts, siting strategies, and ideas for educating the community about the project. In one exercise, balloons were used to demarcate the location of the proposed cistern, while stumps were colored in white chalk to heighten awareness of the drought problem. By creating this “performance,” the West Austin Park team encouraged stakeholders to come give their feedback on the problem and proposed response. In addition, the purple balloons represented an early step in the branding/education campaign of the project: the City of Austin has taken the public safety measure of requiring all reclaimed water receptacles to be colored purple.

On-site activities also helped team members initiate a valuable relationship with the Austin Parks & Recreation Department. Though the siting of the construction changed multiple times during the practicum, early attempts at marking the footprint of the concrete pad proved to be useful. Students could then respond to architectural themes such as views, scale, approach, and drainage.
“Our structure is designed to reveal the purple color of the tank as an educational element as well as providing a safe and aesthetically pleasing enclosure.... This education will hopefully not only raise the awareness of water conservation methods, but also inspire a change in the way that the people of Austin approach their own daily use of such a limited resource.”

Allison Forman

Design Development

Having gathered key information from community members, the Holly Neighborhood team began developing their design for the cistern enclosure. Through models, drawings, and diagrams, they discussed their project amongst themselves and participated in pinups with PID instructors and fellow students.

Based on the community input, the team identified three goals: education on reclaimed water, creating an entry into the park, and providing amenities such as seating and a place for self-expression. The team decided that the water tank must be visible in order to educate neighbors about its role in water reclamation. By painting the tank purple, it could be identified with the City’s branding for reclaimed water, making the connection to other irrigation pipes and tanks across the city. The team proposed that the same purple also be used on fencing around newly planted seedlings to reiterate the role of reclaimed water in their growth.
The team designed the cistern enclosure to make the purple water tank visible through horizontal strips of polygal. Framing was carved away at one corner of the structure to create a small seating nook, creating an amenity for the park. Because of grade change around the cistern enclosure, the concrete pad that supports the cistern could itself be the bench, providing seating a comfortable distance from the ground. A large sliding barn door made from reclaimed wood on a steel frame provides access to the cistern when needed, while also serving as a community board facing the entry path to the park. The pathway is further enhanced with cast iron grates on the ground that direct pedestrians into the park.
Following a round of design revisions, the West Austin Park team met with representatives from the Parks & Recreation Department and various other stakeholders to present their proposal. The stakeholders were unanimous in their support of the proposal and were particularly impressed with the team’s integration of community input and the City of Austin’s recommendations regarding the purple “branding” of the project.
MATERIALS: WEST AUSTIN PARK CISTERN ENCLOSURE

CEMENT BOARD: SIDING
POLY GAL: SIDING
TREATED LUMBER: FRAMING
RECLAIMED WOOD: DOOR
LATEX PAINT: TANK
Fabrication of the cistern enclosure was heavily dependent upon the pouring of the concrete pad. By the time all parties (neighborhood, governmental, and student) agreed on the location of the slab, only two weeks remained in the build period. After framing the structure the team slid in the cistern and clad the walls with a combination of cement board and polygal. Finishing touches included a sliding steel-frame door and seating nook, both infilled with reclaimed wood. The project became a community attraction during the build, with team members regularly receiving input from passers-by.
“The Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARD) began building the 9’-0” x 11’6” concrete foundation on Monday. A small crowd gathered to watch the concrete pour that evening. It is worth noting all the interested parties in attendance as the slab went in: PARD’s landscape architect who met with us several times and prepared the slab drawing, Fred Fuller; PARD’s Urban Forestry coordinator who has been heavily invested in the project, Anna Gonzales; practicum professor, Cisco Gomes; neighborhood resident and seminar professor, Steven Moore and Steven’s wife Marjorie; the four PID students on our team; and several neighborhood children and their parents. The list is indicative of the highly-collaborative nature of this project which involved several entities as well as the general public of Clarksville.”

Kristina Olivent
“Simply by being present in the park and building, we have probably educated more people about reclaimed water than we did during our weeks of outreach work. Hopefully the unique structure will continue to pique people’s curiosity, leading them to talk to their neighbors and spread more awareness about reclaimed water, which will further aid education.”

Claire Edelen

Final Presentation

The last element of the design to be fabricated and installed on the morning of the presentation was a sliding door that controlled access to the interior of the enclosure. Neighbors and city partners expressed appreciation as plans were made by the parks department to install the irrigation piping, and more importantly, to extend this pilot project to other urban parks with distressed trees around the city.
SAN FRANCISCO
Public Interest Design Externship
Evaluating Built Works

After spending several weeks in Austin researching the history and methods of Public Interest Design, approximately half of the summer course students departed for San Francisco. They spent 2 weeks on the West Coast applying new knowledge of public design assessment systems to built projects from the scale of small buildings to urban design and broad networks.

Students collaborated with Public Architecture staff to produce reports that address site history, design process, intentions of the designers, and public reception of the project. The interview process behind the reports connected students to architecture firms in San Francisco, as well as building managers, city employees, and users of the sites.

Projects

Sunshine Cooperative Nursery
McCall Design Group

San Francisco Conservatory of Music
Perkins + Will

Mint Plaza
CMG Landscape Architects

Proxy
envelope a+d

Parklets
Paul Chasin, Ben Grant at Spur, Boor Bridges Architecture, Craig Hollow Design, Jack Verdon Architecture, Ogrydziak / Prillinger, Rebar, rg-architecture
photos by Cynthia Garcia, courtesy of Public Architecture
Sunset Cooperative Nursery School began as a Works Progress Administration project in 1940, then called Parkside Play Center. Over the years, the school has changed names and locations, but has always remained in the Outer Sunset Neighborhood and worked internally for improvements to the school community. The school operates under the Reggio Emilia teaching approach that teachers at the school describe as play-based and social-skill building, focusing on emotional understanding and relationships through “natural, environmentally-influenced curriculums.” The Reggio Emilia approach also involves a high degree of parent involvement.

In 1949, Sunset Nursery launched a building project to raise funds for purchasing a building. The property purchased in 1951 at 4245 Lawton Street was the home of the school for the next 59 years. Improvements to the school such as the Red Tower and Bumpity Bump room came about as grass-roots initiatives among parents and teachers working collaboratively to serve the educational and functional needs of the school.

In 2004, it was discovered that the rebar inside the masonry school building had completely rotted and that the school was no longer suitable for use in case of a seismic event. In 2007, a large donation was made to the nursery, allowing the school to begin the rebuilding process. Seven
architects and builders were parents at the time, many of them on the Building Committee. One parent-architect, Rich Gillern, took the lead in creating new schematic diagrams. Gillern and his wife then brought McCall Design Group to the Building Committee as the architect of record.

Reception

Data collection for the report included interviews with parents, teachers, designers, and contractors as well as class observation, notes, permits, plans, school materials, site visits, and research into the Reggio Emilia approach.

The new exterior of Sunset Nursery simply and elegantly shows a quality of education and quality of care that was already very active inside the school. It represents a long, stressful, and ultimately rewarding collaborative process representing the ideals that teachers and families bring to the space in support of the children.

The physical expression of the building’s program emphasizes visual and circulatory connections between the exterior and interior spaces, derived from observation of the movement of children and teachers in the old building. In a very concrete sense, the designers have also brought building practice into the school’s curriculum by exposing wooden trusses that support the roof. Color and texture were important in materials selection to make children feel secure and at home.
Place and Meaning

There are a few underlying beliefs that shaped our approach to the analysis of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. First, the built environment affects behavior and carries the potential to significantly elevate or hamper people’s lives. Second, it is in the situational nature of being occupied in a particular place that a building develops meaning. As we concern ourselves with the human element, we ask, how have the people who use the building animated it, and reciprocally, how does the building impact its occupants and place? Our study looks to key people who have both knowledge and the ability to express it and uses interviews with them as the foundation of interpretation. Conversations with school administrators, the design team, students, and faculty have given meaning and life to our study of this Perkins + Will project.

Community Interaction

The SCUP/AIA-CAE Excellence in Architecture Merit Award for the SFCM defines a goal for the building as striving to “integrate program uses to create a building supporting and encouraging community interaction.” Interviews with the design team reveal a threefold goal of the project: to encourage interaction among students, support interaction with the larger music community, and foster a symbolic interaction with the conservatory’s dual mission of both preserving music tradition and advancing new music within
the tradition. The atrium best exemplifies the achievement of these goals.

Resonance

The school doesn’t have a lobby large enough to accommodate an informal performance crowd, so Perkins + Will imagined people spread among floors, with circulation through the atrium ensuring student presence. Students are showcased throughout the buildings as faculty offices and studios are mixed with convenient seating to animate all areas of the building.

A student describes his experience in the atrium, “You might find three different guitarists spread out, just practicing.... It makes the space feel like you’re in a conservatory. You’re in a space of music.”
A thorough investigation of the design intentions and user receptions of Mint Plaza and consideration of the gap between them can be used to evaluate the role of public interest design as it increases the sustainability of our cities. This assertion, however, requires a definition of terms. Public interest design is design that benefits and engages its community not only after completion, but also during the design process. Sustainability refers to socially, economically, and environmentally healthy communities and the capacity to maintain them. As it is holistically defined, sustainability is arguably inextricable from public interest design. The success of Mint Plaza and the value of public interest design can be evaluated by comparing intentions and receptions by using qualitative research methods such as observation, photography, interviews, and archival analysis.

The objective to create a flexible, open space that invites a broad range of activities is repeated in press articles about Mint Plaza and corroborated by CMG in its project description which refers to Mint Plaza as “an urban stage,” “a novel space for flexible urban life,” and “a flexible open space to serve any number of events and programs.” This intention was desirable by both architects and the public, who were engaged through a series of community meetings aimed at garnering public input and promoting
neighborhood ownership of the project.” A non-profit group, Friends of Mint Plaza was set up to organize temporary programming that would pay for long-term maintenance. Though Mint Plaza is publicly owned, the city is indemnified from any maintenance claims.

**Receptions**

Overall, Mint Plaza presents an effective design and framework for current and future urban improvements characterized by broad-focus sustainability. It is a catalyst for growth, community improvement, and promotion of PID principles. People use the space as a passageway, a quiet place to enjoy lunch, to nap in the sun, to bring their kids, or to be alone. The bright orange chairs invite a diverse group of people to occupy the space. In addition to casual daily use, four dance companies promote public arts events in the plaza. Mint Plaza is a symbol of a neighborhood in transition and a strategy to catalyze sustainable urban development in the surrounding neighborhood. Its catalytic quality is challenged, however, by future economic development, and gentrification pressures obscure social equality. Its current impact is tangible but tentative. The test of Mint Plaza’s success, as acknowledged by CMG, will come with the Mid-Market area’s revitalization and whether the rhetoric of sustainability continues to be put into practice in the built environment.
Restructuring Urban Space

San Francisco’s Hayes Valley neighborhood was cut off from the center of the city by the double-decker Central Freeway. After the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, the heavily damaged structure was torn down and the mayor’s office made a formal request for proposals in 2009 that asked for creative but temporary uses of vacant lots along Octavia Boulevard to “activate” the unused lots and “promote economic development.” Envelope A+D responded to the request with their concept for temporary, flexible urbanism: proxy.

Architect

Proxy, as envisioned by Douglas Burnham and colleagues at Envelope A+D, is an “experiment in flexible urbanism,” inspired by the work of Archigram and Superstudio. It is a place to make physical the culture of connected experience that lives virtually in the internet. This materialization through flexibility and acceptance of temporariness allows proxy to become a “content machine,” constantly changing, creating new outlets for connection through cultural experiences. Flexibility is embedded into many site elements at a variety of scales both spatially and temporally.

People

Since Hayes Street has become such an important commercial corridor within the city, both the residents and local merchants are very vocal
regarding neighborhood planning. The population is unique for being economically, racially, and generationally diverse. Local residents wanted to see an activated space that would enhance the community rather than remain vacant, and local merchants desired business growth. Envelope A+D found that incorporating flexibility into their design that enabled the site to be in flux throughout the day was the key to successfully situating their own intentions within the vision the local community had for the future of the neighborhood.

The proxy site houses a number of small businesses in unique temporary structures. Food trucks such as Off the Grid are mobile, while Smitten Ice Cream embraces temporariness by housing their store in a recycled shipping container. Ritual Roaster’s popup store is consistently praised for its beautiful pop-up storefront.

City

The city is enormously supportive of the vision of proxy, though difficulties with vendor permitting make it an unsustainable model for future projects. It does, however, demonstrate the willingness of the mayor’s office to experiment with creative urban development. From Burnham’s point of view, policy and economics should come together to create a lasting effect on the city in the form of funding for these types of projects.
Tactical Urbanism

A parklet is an urban intervention to create more public space. Parklets, like traditional parks, function as public space, but rely on the stewardship of a sponsoring business rather than a municipal agency. Parklets are built in the public right of way, typically repurposing two adjacent parking spaces, shifting their use from the storage of cars to pedestrian-centered public space. In San Francisco, approved parklets receive a renewable 1 year permit. The firm Rebar takes a unique approach to design practice, something they call tactical urbanism; “the use of modest or temporary revisions to urban space to seed structural environmental change.” Rebar believes there is a deep underlying relationship between the physical environment and the organizational structures that govern it. Tactical urbanism, then, is a means to challenge the extent of both.

Questions of Agency

The concept of a parklet is more political than most citizens realize. Historically, public space has been an imposition of will by a governing body. City agencies decide where parks go and how people can use them. Parklets are a complete reversal of this process. It is the citizens who find failing spaces within the city and redesign them to encourage use. At the start of the parklet program, businesses sponsored parklets and many functioned as extensions for cafe seating. The second and third wave of parklet building has
seen a shift towards crowdsourced funding and are being designed as community spaces.

A Theory of Parklets

In our study of parklets, we have determined crucial qualities for their success. Embeddedness in the culture of the community is an absolute necessity. They must be responsive to their physical location and understand their local demographic. The parklet must also have an appropriate functional program that fits into its geographic context. Public realm projects like parklets contribute to a shift in the design community towards more socially conscious and civically minded work, ensuring that architecture remains a socially relevant profession.
CONCLUSION
Reflections + Next Steps
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 Office of Sustainability. 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 see across disciplines while focusing concerted efforts to a common cause.

Finally, student responses to the experiences were shaped around three key learning themes. First, students recognized the role of ethics in shaping a critical consciousness of the role of the designer in cultivating community change. Second, emphasis was placed on the value in building upon existing community resources toward improved future scenarios and social justice. Third, students lauded the extent to which the PID program evoked civic responsibility and professional development through actual building projects.

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.
Post Evaluation Surveys

The student participants of the 2012 Public Interest Design program rated their experience with the program according to the statements below, with 5 as “strongly agree” and 1 as “strongly disagree.” The average score of the student responses is listed next to each statement. As evident from the responses, students viewed this program as being an extremely successful and worthwhile experience.”

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

4.5 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.

4.3 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.

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

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

4.3 The class allowed me to reflect critically on the ethics of attempting to give voice to community perspectives in design processes.

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

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

4.5 The class helped me to understand the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge production in the field of public interest design.
The students gave their personal feedback about their experiences with the program.

“All the blood, sweat, and tears paid off when we saw how much our project helped the community.”

“The PID program put us at the center of the public interest design movement for eight weeks. We met with leaders in the field, discussed PID theories, ethics and methods, and we were pushed to really develop our own ideas and think critically about how and why we practice design.”

“This summer’s Public Interest Design courses were extremely valuable to me as a budding architect. The specialized PID training provided me with a rich historical and ethical basis to work from as well as precious first-hand experience in how to improve our collective experience through the built realm. I am looking forward to the challenge of a life-long career of designing in the public interest.”

“I consider myself exceptionally fortunate to been able to engage with a wide variety of insightful perspectives on PID from both UT faculty and visiting lecturers David Perkes, Bryan Bell, and John Peterson.”

“The guest lectures were very inspiring and brought a lot of new knowledge to both the existing projects and how I think about my future.”

“The PID program allowed me to realistically think about my future in less traditional roles. Possibly some of the connections made through the project could be helpful in the future.”

“My favorite part was the access we received to the leading minds in the public architecture movement—David Perkes, Bryan Bell, John Peterson, and Jess Zimbabwe. We spoke with them in a classroom environment, in reviews, brainstorming sessions, and even over meals. The conversations were informing, intimate, probing, and honest. They were the best kinds of interactions one can have in an academic setting and I felt very privileged to be able to participate in them.”