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Publicly Engaged Design Scholarship: Reflections on Practice

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NARRATIVE

A common theme with the diverse academics of publicly engaged scholarship is an uncertainty about whether or not this kind of practice could fairly pay off the time and speculation put in, particularly, early on, counting towards tenure and promotion. Talking through the doubt seems essential. Understanding the realities involved can help in defining a possible scope and fine-tuning the intensity of the work to be undertaken, as to be further proportionate to an institution's culture and discipline. This understanding can likewise help in identifying some more optimal ways for integrating, performing, and disseminating public scholarship outcomes towards tenure and promotion. This essay is an in-the-works self-reflective piece on personal academic practices. The aim is to pinpoint few of the challenges and prospects associated with the engaged practices, all through the eyes of a novice tenure-track faculty experience. Reflections, in this case, are made from academic activities in the design field of architecture, further resonating with early-years of a full-time tenure-track occupation. Challenges and opportunities are offered in consort with a few applied examples, as mergers of teaching, research, and service, with more information included as appendix. Efforts overall have aimed at social impact outcomes by engaging architectural design (thinking) in the built environment. As future research possibilities, a larger depository of case studies in the area of publicly engaged design scholarship can help other individuals with similar questions and aspirations. These can add to a largely accessible knowledge base to facilitate the circulation of information for design individuals seeking to plan and execute engaged projects and activities.

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP

The scholarship of engagement has, in the past decades, found more prevalence in the design field of architecture, as it did similarly in the arts and humanities. The definition of scholarship had been expanded beyond conventional delineations, as a broader concept embracing a multitude of forms including exploration, teaching, engagement, application, and integration (Boyer, 1990; & Boyer 1996). Forms of activities and engagements have become vastly diverse in academia, also demarcated by a variety of personal and professional characteristics (Schweitzer et al, 2011). Imagining America is the only national coalition working explicitly at the nexus of publicly engaged scholarship and the humanities, arts, and design (Haft, 2015). IA defines Public Scholarship as an area that entails various modes of generating and disseminating knowledge for/with publics and communities (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). This definition includes both scholarly and creative activities connecting rigorous academic work with commitment to public outcomes. In addition to IA, IUPUI outlines Public Scholarship as the rigorous scholarly and methodological undertakings responding to public audiences and advancing disciplines through the emphasis on co-productions of knowledge with publics and communities (Wood et al, 2016). Both definitions portray shaping ways for mutual benefits and partnerships between higher education entities and public/private organizations. Despite greater variations in forms of activities and engagements, Public Scholarship as a classification itself can also be seen as a linking thread. This is conceivable to assist in integrations between the engaged academics' *research*, *teaching* and *service* activities and outcomes. The adoption can benefit by permitting stronger connections and further synergies.

CHALLENGE

Scholarships of any kinds including applied research and creative activities demand the use of some forms of data and its processing. One challenge identified by a novice academic involved in publicly engaged design scholarship is (the ambiguity of) approach to data. This brings up issues with the identification, assembly and composition of information for scholarly productions. The academic could assume to fully isolate research from the engaged practice; however, the engaged work itself is heavily time intensive in nature, which, if not integrated with the teaching, research, and service, could leave the academic with much lesser to no time for any other research activity. Realistically, the amount of time that should be put early on and throughout the process into the planning and creation of engagement experiences can also always take away much of the essential time needed for additional data processing. Questions on data typologies are also often raised because of the dynamic, more intangible, and often less predictable quality of the extracted results. Presuming that data types could anyway vary to a great extent from one field to the other, the more dynamic and miscellaneous nature of the information extracted from the engaged work can be presented to a novice academic as an additionally tricky situation. Often, compared to typical research processes, the publicly engaged information is a lot more scattered and unrefined for scholarly productions. In similar comparisons, conventional scholarships would typically have larger numbers of literature or set precedents for the work to learn from. Overall, all such challenges can impact both the quality and quantity of a novice academic's produced public scholarship.

Despite impressions of academics with complete freedom on types of research productions, a tacit awareness can reveal how some forms of scholarships would just look better than others in the eyes of review committees. An implied dimension is opinions on publicly engaged work, being looked through lenses of gender and rigor bias. In a public scholar's dossier, adopting more methodical approaches to data and ways of representing the rigor can help in changing cultures and enhancing perceptions. Early discussions with peers from the field can be essential on what best could constitute or be turned into scholarly documentations. Moreover, growths in the publicly-engaged design scholarship literature depositories can advantage the knowledge on further effective ways of articulating outcomes. Studies could range from best practices of extracting data from engaged practices to ways of synthesizing data towards high-quality public scholarship, highlighted with excellence for use in the tenure and promotion process. The scarcity of design literature in this area demands further developments on ways of turning the foremost intangibles engaged outcomes around, into tangible sources for scholarly productions.

Doberneck et al's study (2011) offer comprehensive categorical definitions on publicly engaged work typologies. Filtered through those, practices discussed in this essay are mainly embracing: creative activities, for-credit instruction through curricular, community-engaged learning, and discipline-related service (p. 12). The main intent of all activities is to formulate positive social impact through architectural design (thinking). Activities, for the most part, are integrated into teaching practices, commonly, through community-based design studio projects as well as freshmen non-major service-learning course offerings. The latter is accomplished through an initiative titled as the Projects for the Common Good. Practices are persistently place-based, with the expectations and attempts to tackle parts of local and regional issues. Proactive steering methodologies applied in the process are reaching out for collaborations with non-university organization partners. While involving students in for-credit courseworks, projects embrace some of the more timely needs of the communities. Exertions, mostly accomplished through courses and project initiatives, include, but are not limited to, bringing community members onto the campus and taking students into community settings.

Most of the engaged work, in this case, has been integrated with teaching assignments. The goal has been to make up larger rooms for collaboration with communities, for the expansion of local and regional knowledge, and for enhancing civic learning and democratic participation for students. As a main venue, community-based design studios have resulted in design proposal offerings to communities. Projects go through the processes that are emphasizing design-research and engaging critical questions on the social and ethical roles in/of architectural design. The most important dimension involved in the teaching is the inclusion of the notion of the "social" in architectural terms. As Cuff (1991) once put, the social in architecture contains the "everyday life," the *economic*, *interactive*, and *political* realms of architectural making (p. 13). As Schwartz et al (2014) added, the social delineates many forms in the practice of architecture, likewise, situating the context of collective interactions in professional architectural practices. The everyday-life part

of this social encompasses both *internal* and *external* components. The internal is occurring “within the office between members of the firm,” while the external is taking place “outside the office with the array of other stakeholders invested in the project: engineers, politicians, clients, and the like.” The idea leads the notion that the social is also definable as “the primary component of civic engagement (p. 78).” The teaching practices only take on design projects that are likewise capable of generating critical social discourses, along with including more optimism in their prospects. In seeking positive impacts, projects assimilate social consciousness, community outreach, and the triple bottom line of sustainability. These aspects get engaged in a variety of forms in the design process to address an array of, and, yet often, re-occurring social themes. The community outreach dimension is particularly rooted as an important part of the applied design-research method in the design process. The scholarly aim is to use the studio results coupled with student learning reflections, being processed and reproduced into scholarly outcomes. This, in this case, is observed as a possible optimize way for creating overlapping synergies between required tenure activities in terms of time and efforts.

The Projects for the Common Good initiative is a highlight of the engaged practices. Since 2015, this has resulted in a number of design-built furniture productions for the community gardens run by the Common Good, a local non-profit organization in Bowling Green, Ohio. Having since become a regular community partner, the organization provides a significant place for the city. By offering weekly events, food, indulgence, spirituality and other supports, the Common Good has created a safe community for the campus, outside the campus. To make the engaged initiative possible, activities are designed to be fully integrated and, in terms of time, be fully aligned with teaching. This is conducted within the structure of a BGSU 1910 freshmen (non-major) course offering every fall semester, also titled: Projects for the Common Good. Course learning outcomes are explicitly geared towards benefitting the organization by putting together the conceptualizations and productions of objects that are urgent needs of the organization. In comparison to the engaged outcomes achieved from community-based architectural design studio courses, the outcomes from the non-architecture courses are further concrete and tangible. The smaller scope of those design-built projects has allowed both the projects’ definitions and their processes to mold in a close partnership and in collaboration with the Common Good. The course format itself has played the role of a coordinating framework, used in besieging student groups and selected consultants to participate regularly in a project ideation and its fruition. A long-term goal with the initiative is to use and learn from the process as a pilot program in leading loftier community-engaged design-built projects at the architectural program scale in the future. The scalable and manageable nature has made possible a positive start for expanding future curriculum foundation possibilities for larger projects with broader capacities for social impacts in the built environment.

As a novice academic, it is important to continuously ask realistic questions about the scholarly outcomes achievable in shorter time spans. It is also critical to understand institution-level expectations and opinions on publicly engaged scholarship. Despite the extensive labor required, the publicly engaged work by itself may not count as scholarship. Depending on the institution culture, the reproduction of engaged design outcomes in forms of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and Scholarship of Engagement are possible routes. Although still possible over a longer time span, the outcomes of a single or few teaching engagement efforts are less likely to end up as full-blown, data-driven research articles or complete case studies counting towards early tenure and promotion. For scholarly productions, small sample sizes or data coming from one university, or a single course would present challenges to journal reviewers in regards to the research validation and the validity of instruments used in the process. Questions on the generalizability of findings can result in a lesser number of scholarship productions in the significant areas of advancing theory and/or methodology of the publicly engaged work. This is also going to be a challenge for design and theory-related journals within an applied field such as architecture. Personal experiences in this category can suggest more scholarship prospects in report-like, in-progress publication formats that could be speaking both to the success and best failures of these engaged kinds of case studies. For effective production, instead of concentrations on quantifications of outcomes, more in-depth interpretative manuscripts might be able to better explore the ways in which students, community groups, and design peers respond to the integration of publicly engaged dimensions in design.

PROSPECT

Contributing towards society is only part of reasons for the pursuit of publicly engaged work as an academic. The literature has declared the work-life balance as a challenge during the tenure process, especially, for women with young children (Hellsten et al, 2011; Edwards et al, 2009; O'laughlin & Bischof, 2005; Gappa et al, 2005; & Acker and Armenti, 2004). The female experience towards tenure can be different. Acker and Armenti (2004) argue that "issues around children and career, anxieties about evaluation, and fatigue and stress shape the daily lives of women academics." Part of this overwhelming nature is a feeling of disconnectedness and isolation soaring from issues such as needs of constantly negotiating work, life, and well-being, along with deficiencies in steady mentorships and emotional support (Hellsten et al, 2011). Emerging from graduate school, workplace balance expectations are often not going to stay the same. Over the past few years, having experienced firsthand some of these effects, coming to a decision for pursuing an engaged practice has become not just an academic, but also a personal choice. Engaged scholarship has enabled the opening up of rooms for positive contact outside direct academic environments, perceived to be tedious at times. In effect, the ability to meet other stakeholders and to serve external groups with real needs have created moments of satisfaction, nurturing a way of connectedness with people and places. As a world citizen who has constantly been moving in, out and in-between places, countries and states, the engaged aspects of the scholarship has been a way to cope, allowing further rootedness to and a stronger sense of place. These aspects, despite the loads and stressors of a path to tenure, have positively contributed to a relatively lesser feeling of isolation and improved social well-being.

As an emerging scholar and design-researcher, the publicly engaged scholarship has been both intellectually and personally appealing. The literature is also acknowledging a new citizenry that is emerging within academia (Clayton, Edwards, and Brackmann, 2013; Eatman, 2012; Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton, 2009; Alperovitz, Dubb, and Howard, 2008; Austin 2002; Beckman, Brandenberger, and Shappell, 2009; Hale, 2008; O'Meara 2006; & Rice, 2005). As Eatman (2012) asserts, the arc of the academic career bends toward collaborative futures and further engaged forms of scholarship. These early years at this institution, Bowling Green State University, have so far echoed optimistic early-career support offerings, creating positive conditions for public scholarship to flourish. It has been both inspirational and favorable that the institution, determined to support community engagement, has not been limiting efforts to a one-size-fits-all approach in faculty development. These years are benefited from a suitable distribution of resources, allocated in support of different types of engaged scholarship. Namely, most of the practical assets are distributed by BGSU Center for Community and Civic Engagement, which has played a significant nurturing part in pushing the initiatives rendered in the essay. Diverse and operative community-based learning and professional development programs are assembled in successfully assisting in the building of faculty capacities for engagement. The outreach and flexibly are tailored in extending to various faculty pursuing different types of publicly engaged scholarship, including those in the design field of architecture. Despite the challenges indicated earlier in the representation and publication of outcomes (in comparison to conventional research), these other (personal, professional, and public-good) benefits have outnumbered such defies.

In addition to personal and intellectual benefits, the additional, concrete, place-based and humanistic delineations of the engaged scholarship is making it further appealing. As a design-researcher also interested in the notion of the social [impact] in/of architecture, the engagement process offers characteristics of a "hybrid" career in academia that is also inclusive of some practical dimensions. The diversity of outcomes, likewise leading public good impacts, as well as a more diverse and creative scholarly production make an extra bonus. Stepping in this path provided some relief from a purely elite academic identity, helping to promote a scholar as a member of a more diverse and protean educational culture. This form of practice, by allowing further assimilation of quotidian perspectives and a variety of knowledge sources, has permeated further connectedness with society. Hitherto, during these primary years, the engaged design scholarship is brought into play as a solution. Having had in mind a desire of keeping the spirits of a graduate student going and establishing a somewhat hybrid career, this has been effective in interlacing academic expertise with design capabilities. As the 13th Century Persian poet, Saadi Shirazi once said, "a scholar who keeps his knowledge only in his head is like "A bee without honey."

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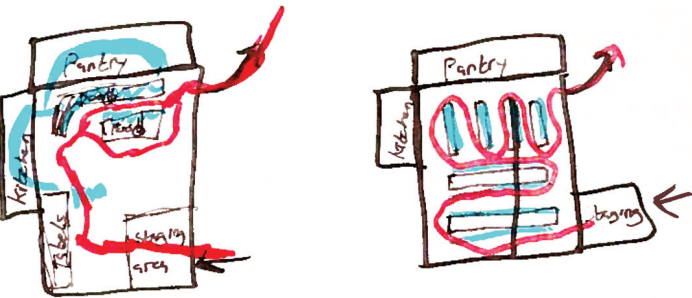
APPENDIX

BGSU
Assistant Professor | Fall 2016
ARCH 3210 | Design for Food Insecurity
Project | One-Stop Community Center and Garden

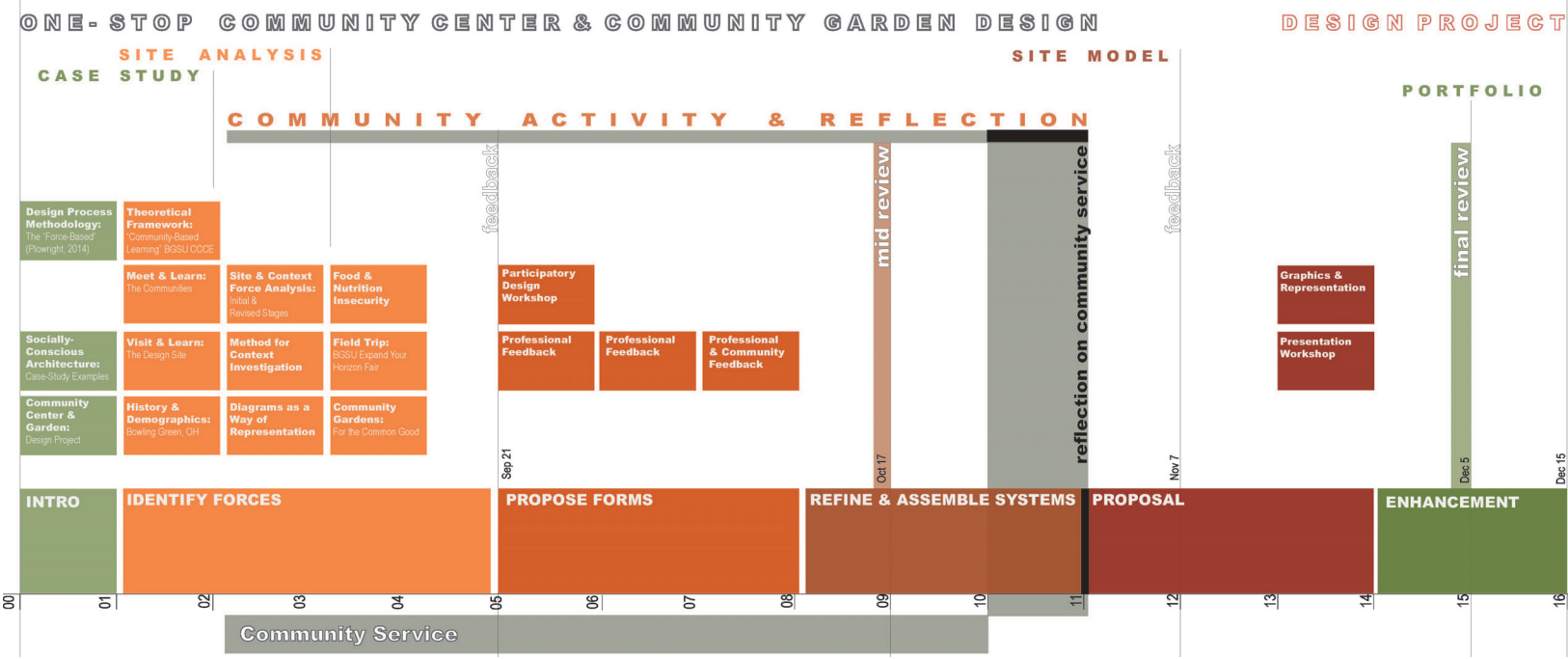
This undergraduate studio applied Problem-Based Service-Learning, integrating community-engaged components. The “Force-Based Design Method (Plowright, 2014)” was also used as the key framework. In creating socially-conscious architectural spaces informed by community awareness and participation, students worked with two local communities: the First United Methodist Church and Common Good. Assumed those with the role of the “clients,” students designed a “One-Stop” Community Center as an expansion to the current church building and planned to enhance the existing giving garden on the site run by the Common Good. Programs were put together in collaboration with the concurrent pastor. The center was envisioned for people to receive help from caring ministries (food pantry and distribution, clothing, day center, offices--Wood Area Ministries, Habitat for Humanity). Mutual partnership benefits were developed through face-to-face meetings, and numerous formal and informal discussions for shared understandings. While seeking after ideas embodying realism, design outcomes were created as visionary proposals to inspire future expansion possibilities. Design-research was an important component. Students each performed community service activities at the site’s Martha’s kitchen and food pantry. These benefitted the organization as well as students in better understanding current space needs. Understanding the challenges hands on helped in shaping new ways of thinking and enhancing the design solutions. Community experience outcomes were also presented as part of a reflection assignment via sketches and diagrams.



Project Groups Sharing Field Notes from Extensive Force Analysis Process



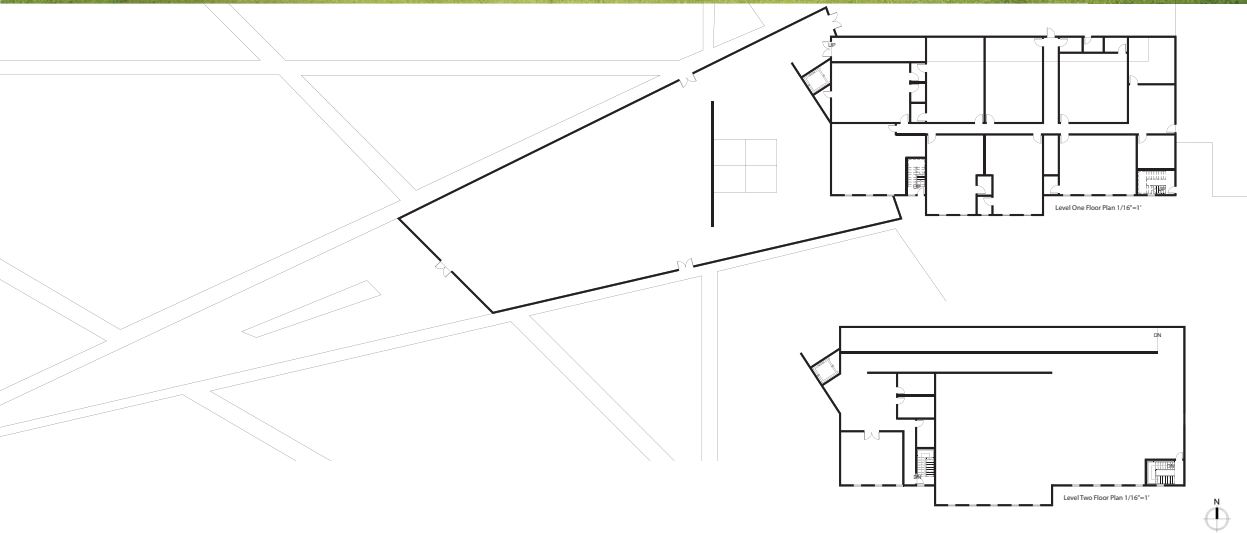
Present and Future Food Distribution Zone and Circulation | Joshua Linhardt



Empathy through Life Stories at Community Kitchen | Haley Evans

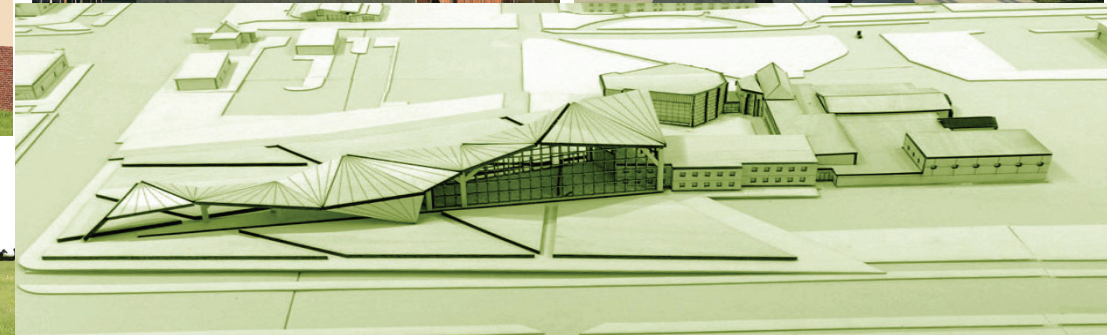
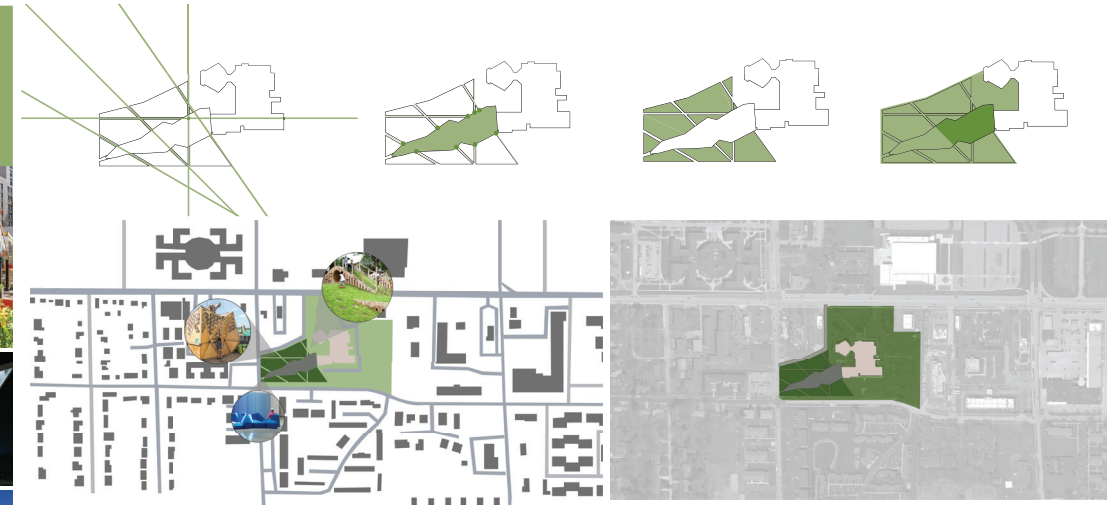
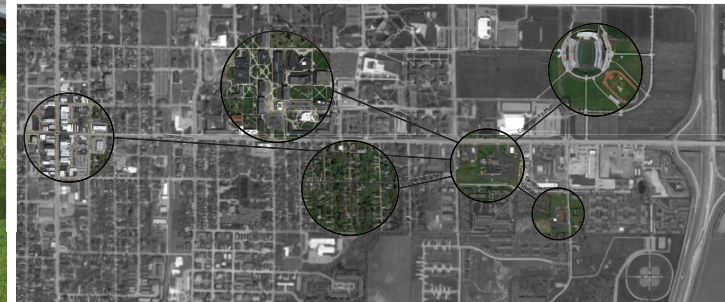
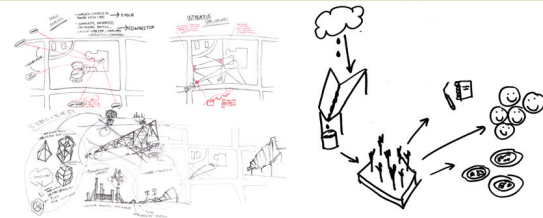


Haley Evans
 FALL 2016 ARCH 3210 | Design for Food Insecurity
 One-Stop Community Center and Giving Garden



Connected Continuum

Several trips to the existing site (First United Methodist Church), volunteering and interviewing visitors, revealed what visitors and workers would value most in a new community center. Feasibility would need to be an important feature of the design. The center would need to support a food pantry, market kitchen, clothing donations and many other types of events. The design presented here strives to create multiple uses for every aspect of the new center. For example, the roof that anchors the community center is also a water catchment system. The water it collects feeds the food pantry. This process creates a cycle. The site is also shaped by the form of connections. A grid was used to make connections from the community to the site in order to carve out different garden spaces throughout the site. The new center also reads open and flexible spaces. This design features a large open space with a connected storage area. Volunteers can move food, clothing, and supplies in and out of the storage area into the multi-purpose space as needed for the many different events. The Connected Continuum creates this design of a modern angular community center.



BGSU
Assistant Professor | Fall 2015.16.17
BGSU 1910 | Projects for the Common Good

Projects for the Common Good is established as an initiative that has been reshaped since the fall 2015 semester integrated with teaching BGSU 1910 courses. Every fall semester, a course is taught to non-architecture major freshmen, engaging community components and contributing to student learning in related scholarship of engagement. Tangible outcomes are small-scale design-built furniture object projects with the social purpose to address some of the essential needs of the local non-profit organization partner, the Common Good in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Previous classes manufactured two outdoor information boards and one produce stand for two BG Community Gardens. These are giving gardens where anyone could walk on to take fresh produce. The communication boards have particularly assisted in sharing plant need information and announcing events. The produce stand has helped with the storage and dissemination of fresh harvest. Current project at hand is a Little Free Library to be installed outside the Common Good's current street location. The Common Good's previous Free Library was damaged due to a bad weather incident on April 8, 2016; a large tree limb broke off the tree in their yard, hit the gutter, and took out the book box!



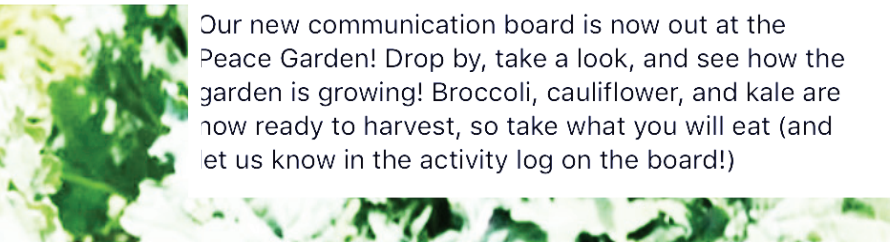
projects_for_common_good
19 posts 32 followers 31 following



**Communication Board
Produce Stand**
FALL 2016 BGSU 1910
Peace Lutheran Community Garden



The Common Good added 2 new photos.
Sunday at 9:30 PM · 🌐



Communication Board
FALL 2015 BGSU 1910
FUMC Community Garden



Megan Sutherland 📍 Bowling Green Community Gardens
The new communication board was hung today by the grounds crew at First United Methodist church. Thank you so much! The board was provided by the hard work of [Sara Khorshidifard](#) and her class last spring semester at BGSU. Thank you so very much!