Urban Insertion Projects for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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Abstract. The Community Design Work Shop (CDW) is an Institute within the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The CDW has been involved with the community urban design projects in architecture and planning for over twenty years. During this time, the CDW has been involved with the small town projects that promoted the revival of their downtown areas and neighborhoods along with the large infrastructure designs for interstate highways and major arterials for Municipalities and the State of Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. The CDW was engaged in restoration projects for small towns following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastation in 2005. Additionally, the CDW has completed multiple projects for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where the CDW team proposed the design, developed the construction documents and was involved with supervising the building construction. The purpose of the CDW is to function as an outreach Institute to the community for urban design and provide the graduate architecture students an opportunity to gain practical experience with real world design problems. The paper will focus on the process of engaging the university’s administration and students in charrettes and public meetings. Working as a team, the CDW produces the design, develops the construction documents and consults with local architects and engineers. The paper discussion will highlight three of the CDW’s projects: The University Bike Path – which links the University Research Park to the main campus completed in 2014; the redesign of the main campus Quadrangle completed in 2017; and the University International/Cultural Space, currently in progress. These three projects demonstrate how the public can be engaged in a design process; how the student learning benefits of all the students, the public, the development of the design show the construction process to completion.

1. Introduction

The Community Design Workshop (CDW) is a research institute and part of the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Established over 20 years ago, the CDW has completed over 100 projects and worked in 15 parishes throughout the state of Louisiana. The CDW’s focus is to aid neighborhoods, small towns, cities and the university to visualize their potential as a community. Operating as a faculty-led graduate-level studio, the CDW has expertise in urban design, planning, architecture and sustainability.

The CDW is housed in two office/studio locations on the campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Graduate studios are run through the CDW studio facility where projects are developed and
explored and then continued in the summer. The summer studio operates by employing students and faculty members of the School of Architecture and Design.

The role of the CDW in working on the university projects has been multifaceted. For example, in the development of a University Master Plan, the CDW acted as a think-tank to run a series of studios that showed options for the redevelopment of the traditional campus and to address options for the development of a research park. Additionally, the CDW served on charrettes with the architecture firm to help complete the new campus vision. For the University insertion projects: The UL Bike Path, The Quadrangle redesign and the new International/Culture Space, the CDW’s role was to organize the charrettes and public meetings, produce conceptual drawings and design development drawings. “The art of the garden designer is much like that of the architect. The ground plane is the natural starting point, and vertical elements can be raised from it to bound and focus spaces. Roofs and canopies can be added where the shelter is needed. Connections can be made by forming openings, and sequences of movement through which the spaces can be composed.”[1] The Bike Path and Quadrangle redesign required the CDW to produce the construction drawings and help with contract administration to see the project through its completion. Additionally, for the Bike Path, the CDW was tasked with assisting the Lafayette Economic Development Authority in writing the Grant awarded from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development.

2. Community Design Workshop Mission

The School of Architecture and Design provides expertise in urban design, planning, landscape design, architecture and housing. The CDW has collaborated with many state and local governments on urban design and planning projects, as well as neighborhood redevelopments, small town urban design and public university improvement projects. The CDW is committed to rebuilding and renovating neighborhoods, downtown areas and underutilized properties by establishing clearly defined public spaces such as streets, squares, and parks. The inclusion of pedestrian walkways, bike paths, community gardens, linear parks, and creating public space are design scheme priorities. The focus is always placed on the creation of greener and more sustainable places and, whenever possible, incorporates mass transit systems into projects. These design systems lend a level of density to the areas and decrease traffic problems. The CDW is founded on working in a collaborative spirit with the state, city governments, neighborhoods, university administration and personnel and other interested parties throughout their process.

3. Collaborative Process

3.1 Discussion and Education

Instituting a public forum is a common technique implemented in all workshop projects. This manifests itself into two types of discussions: charrettes and public meetings. Both charrettes and public meetings were used for the three projects which helped to educate the involved parties on issues of urbanism, architecture, and planning. The meetings provided a collaborative exchange between the CDW, students, faculty, university administration and others. Each group involved brought with it a wealth of knowledge from their respective area of interest to these discussions. Because of this, the CDW played the role of both educator and student through the exchange provided by the respective parties involved.

3.2 Charrettes

Charrettes are short design exercises that focus on a wide range of design issues. Numerous charrettes took place for the three projects with a representative cross-section of interested parties and professionals in attendance Figure 1. These groups had active roles, collaborated in the charrette process, and helped the CDW to arrive at a consensus regarding the importance of the three projects to the university with respect to planning, architecture, and landscape. Policies and procedures were discussed along with lighting concerns, sound issues and the overall aesthetic properties.
3.3 Public and Drop-in Meetings
Structured public meetings provide a forum for presenting ideas about urbanism to the university officials, student organizations, faculty, and university administrators. Public meetings encourage the formal exchange of ideas between these interested parties. Since the CDW worked on the three university projects in their on-campus studio location, the “drop-in” meetings have also occurred. These informal exchanges provided easy access for the university populace to drop-in and submit input, become educated on the projects’ process and progress, and see the hands-on collaborative approach employed by the CDW. Using the information from these public and informal drop-in meetings, the CDW was able to emphasize and present concepts and procedures for the urban design.

4. University Urban Insertion Projects
4.1 The University Bike Path
The design concept for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s University Bike Path was to link the southern campus starting at the Research Park to the traditional campus with an approximate two-mile bike path and walking trail. The path allows the university’s property to be visualized as one expansive property rather than a series of individual ones. “Separated bike paths should also be provided along greenways and arterials, and through open space corridors.” [2]

Louisiana is an extremely hot and humid state for the majority of the year, therefore, numerous trees were planted along the pathway to provide shade and a respite from the heat. Working with a landscape architect, the CDW incorporated garden spaces and interspersed them throughout the trail’s length. Planted with flowers and small bushes, these gardens act as a buffer between the path and the street while providing a more aesthetically pleasing route and a place for rest. Portions of the Bike Path run through somewhat isolated areas highlighting safety concerns. Working with an expert in lighting design, the Bike Path is lined with the traditional campus acorn light posts and these run for the entire path’s length.

Figure 1. Charrette discussions foster multiple design options
The Bike Path was a collaborative effort between the 502 Graduate Urban Studio, the CDW, university administration and officials, local professionals, the Department of Transportation and Development and the Lafayette Economic Development Authority. Students learned the importance of working as a team and that a variety of professions is required to complete a project of this scope and size. Developed and designed during two phases, the project took approximately six years to complete from the conceptual design to completion of construction. Project work was interrupted during this six-year period by two hurricanes which had a significant impact on the area.

Actual construction was a ten-month process in which the studio had a secondary role in Figure 3. University Facilities and Planning managed the supervision of the construction while the CDW and students were involved with troubleshooting issues that arose during construction. The CDW and students checked the bid process, updated drawings and print drawings and inspected the project on a weekly schedule until completion. The result was an urban design element that links various isolated pieces of property and links the southern campus with the traditional campus by creating a series of gardens, walking trails, and the Bike Path. “When architects are empowered to design for the health, safety, and welfare of their own communities, they have a personal stake in the work and in the results. If we do not support the future of our communities with sensitive design, who else will?”[3] By developing a form of alternative transportation, this multi-use path becomes an important linking element between the two separate campuses and a city park.
4.2 The Quadrangle
The University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Quadrangle has been a central point on campus since the university’s initial founding in 1898. The Quad, as it is commonly known, is still regarded as the traditional center of campus. The campus itself retains most of its original classroom buildings that date back to the turn of the 19th century and has many buildings from the 1930s that together establish the campus’s character. The Quad is surrounded on three sides with a covered, arched walkway (arcade). The arcade and surrounding buildings are constructed from red brick, trimmed in limestone and have white, wooden details. All this established the palette on which the CDW would redesign the Quad.
The redesign itself incorporated the super geometry of a circle being inserted into the Quad to organize the space placing a fountain in the center Figure 4. Surrounding the central area is a plaza incorporated with new walkways and landscaping. Concrete sidewalks were used along with the traditional UL brick, thus tying the Quad area back to the rest of the campus. Centuries old Live Oak trees anchor the center square of the Quad. The central focus point, the fountain, has a 21-foot metal Fleur de Lis constructed as a three-dimensional sculpture Figure 5. Lights were added which enable the space to be utilized both at night and during the daytime. Crepe Myrtle trees were added and ring the organizing circle. The Walk of Honor is a pathway that includes each graduated student name being engraved on a brick paver and then placed along the path. This Walk of Honor was also incorporated into the Quad redesign since a portion of the walkway runs through the Quad.

“The new design is based on input from students who participated in charrettes and surveys since the makeover was first proposed by the Student Government Association in 2010.”[4] It is viewed as a vital step towards enhancing the pedestrian-friendly aspects of campus, including a comfortable gathering place for students, faculty, and staff.

4.3 University International/Cultural Space
The site of Our Lady of Wisdom Church has been declared by the President of the university to become an International/Cultural Space to celebrate the diversity of the university populace. The site is situated on one of the busiest campus intersections and is adjacent to some of the most visited buildings within the campus complex including the Student Union, Angelle Hall and E. K. Long Gym. These buildings host a variety of events for the student body and the Acadiana community. The Diocese of Lafayette intends to relocate the parishioners and build a new church on a site situated across the street. This opens the way for the current site to be redeveloped as a cultural space. As with the other university projects, the palette of red brick and limestone becomes the building code that the CDW must follow. The site is surrounded on two sides by centuries oak trees planted by the first president in 1900.
Figure 6. Our Lady of Wisdom Church

Keeping and utilizing the oak trees that define two of the site’s edges, a third edge will be defined by a planned water wall inscribed with a map of the world. The fourth edge will be defined using the existing church while keeping its classical front and stained glass windows Figure 6. The church is viewed as an urban artifact “Where does the individuality of such a building begin and on what does it depend? Clearly, it depends more on its form than on its material, even if the latter plays a substantial role; but it also depends on being a complicated entity which is developed in both space and time.”[5] The church itself will be repurposed with a variety of events to be run by the Student Union.

The design takes advantage of a corner entry into the heart of the site. This becomes the main circulation for the exterior space. Limestone pavers and red brick pavers are used to adhere to the continuity of the university. A field of trees is then inserted into the overall design to help decrease the scale and provide shade. Three water fountains are axially organized to the stained glass windows in the church. A fourth linear fountain has red pavers at the fountain’s water line and is engraved with the names of important historical leaders and events linked to the university. “Fountains, whether ornately tiled or designed with simplicity in mind, add both architectural intrigue and tranquility to any garden – there’s something about the sound of burbling water that lulls the mind into a meditative state.”[6] The CDW envisioned this important site as a respite inside a busy campus.

5. Results and Discussions
The three University Urban Insertion projects demonstrate how the public can be engaged in a design process, how student learning benefits both the student the public, the development of the design, and shows the construction process to completion. Currently, two of the projects are fully constructed – the University Bike Path and the University Quadrangle. The University International/Cultural Space is currently in the conceptual design phase. “In cities of all sizes and in all regions, developers, designers,
planners, and public officials have begun a dialogue about the need to create urban spaces that draw people, to establish a sense of place, that connect various components of the urban environment, and that are usable in addition to being beautiful.” [7]

6. Conclusions
The success for these projects depended on the collaboration and dedication from many parties including the students, faculty, university administrations working alongside with outside consultants, government officials and professionals. Aldo Rossi says “a city is the product of a thousand acts”. The three university insertion projects are an appropriate demonstration of this concept. Benefits to the university are numerous. The campus was improved with a Bike Path that now links the two separated campuses while addressing and improving the safety for students with a lighted pedestrian pathway. The Quad redesign reestablished this area as the main focal point on campus. By making the space more livable, it is now in constant use by faculty, students and staff. The International/Cultural Space celebrates the diversity of the university’s student body while embracing the Acadiana culture. The architecture students learned valuable lessons that emerged from the collaboration between a vast array of professions and students also benefited from the process of working with public institutions and government entities.

References
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