

ARBOR HILL NEIGHBORHOOD PUBLIC ARTS AND ONLINE COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY PRIDE



SUNY Albany Planning Studio, Fall 2008
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PLN 680: Fall 2008 Planning Studio Introduction

Gene Bunnell's Fall 2008 Planning Studio has concentrated its efforts on fostering a lasting and meaningful relationship with the residents and stakeholders in the Arbor Hill Neighborhood. Despite being a historically under-served neighborhood, the community is sustained by a strong sense of community. Arbor Hill presents a unique opportunity for planning varying from community and economic development to land use, transportation, parks, recreation, and others. By referencing the Arbor Hill Neighborhood plan, which is a five year guide to the developments and improvement of Arbor Hill, the studio team was able to assess some particular needs of the community and have developed a plan to enhance the quality of life for its residents.

The relationship with the Arbor Hill community began to form in the Spring of 2008, preceding the fall studio. To initiate the process, University Masters students attended several meetings with the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA) and the Arbor Hill Implantation Team (AHIT). Here, they were able to learn about the issues and goals presented in the neighborhood. Students continued attending meetings throughout the summer and assisted Professor Bunnell with developing different proposals and scenarios for the studio to consider, both for the coming semester as well as in a long-term sense.

What seeped out of the many conversations to ensue over the course of the spring and summer was the dream for a student studio similar to that of Straught Watson's "box of dreams" as featured in the Chattanooga case study in Gene Bunnell's book, "Making Places Special". While the scope of such an undertaking was not feasible for the Fall semester studio, these ideas and dreams laid the groundwork for the future efforts the students have chosen to undertake. After consulting the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan for ideas, the group ultimately decided to focus on three individual, yet coordinated and complimentary projects:

1. Public Arts
2. Online Community Resource
3. Public Open Space

Working simultaneously to improve quality of life in Arbor Hill, the focus of this report is the Public Arts program. That said, it is important to keep in mind the original context of this semester's studio, and most importantly the theme that has evolved out of this work which ultimately bonds these initiatives to the community: ***Pride in Arbor Hill!***

Table of Contents

Arbor Hill: A History to Emphasize, 4

Project Introduction and Background, 4

I. Public Arts, 4

II. Website, 4

Mission Statement, 5

Program Goals, 5

Objective, 6

Action Steps: Public Arts, 6

a. Research Case Studies, 6

b. Establish leaderships for future community arts projects, 8

Arbor Hill Implementation Team (AHIT), 8

New Covenant Charter School, 8

City of Albany, 9

c. Establish a partnership & communications with key stakeholder groups & residents, 9

Public Housing Authority, 9

Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA), 10

Arbor Hill Community Center, Inc. (AHCC), 10

Trinity Institute-Homer Perkins Center Inc, 10

Albany Barn, 10

d. Liabilities, 10

e. Involving Neighborhood Youth, 11

f. Funding sources for future murals, 11

g. Hold joint meetings with multiple community organizations, 12

h. Identify potential sites for murals, 12

i. Potential themes for mural, 13

j. Create drawings for mural, 13

k. Solicit artists to work on the mural – potential artist group, 13

Black Dimensions in Art (BDA), 13

SUNY Albany Artists Cooperative, 14

Upstate Artists Guild (UAG), 14

Chronology of Activities, 14

I. Public Arts, 14

II. Website, 16

Lessons Learned and Recommendations, 17

I. Public Arts, 17

II. Website, 19

Bibliography, 20

Arbor Hill: A History to Emphasize

Creating a mural arts program and the online community resource grew from the desire to capture the rich history of Arbor Hill in a creative form. Drawing from the cultural and historical heritage, the studio has been structured to cultivate a sense of pride in the community. Whether it was the role the area played in the Underground Railroad, a tribute to an American Hero and Albany resident Henry Johnson, expressing the impact of the Ten Broeck Family, or St. Joseph's Church. Each has played a part in shaping the history of Albany area and Arbor Hill.

This rich culture will function as the foundation for the mural arts program and the online community resource. This program is designed to be enjoyed by the residents and visitors of Arbor Hill. By reflecting on the past, area youth will enable themselves to reflect on how Arbor Hill affects them today and what Arbor Hill means to them.

Project Introduction & Background

I. Creating a public arts program:

The Public Arts team began its program with the ambitious goal of creating a mural arts program for the community. The team began researching other cities which had developed successful public arts programs such as Philadelphia (Zero Deflect Designs LLC, 2008) and San Francisco (Precita Park Studio) in order to understand the logistical, technical and administrative pieces of the program and to identify best practices.

After preliminary research, the team realized that a comprehensive public arts program was beyond the scope of the studio due to time constraints. The team was still committed to pursuing an agenda of public arts with the understanding and goal of using art as a tool to promote community pride and empowerment. The group therefore decided to scale back its project to pursue a mini mural within the Arbor Hill Community Center located at 37 N. Lark Street and focus on fostering partnerships with (and between) local community groups and ultimately create a process for creating public art which can be easily replicated and used in the future.

With this in mind, the following report outlines the process the students' took to develop this program. It describes the partnerships established, the community organizations and leaders involved in this program, the activities developed to engage local students, and finally a discussion of resources and logistics. The Appendix contains additional resources and other supporting documentation which may be useful for future reference as well. A special section on best practices and lessons learned may be particularly useful for future groups.

II. Creating an online community resource:

The online community resource emerged in fall 2008 as a result of studio member collaboration and brainstorming. It is an opportunity for Arbor Hill to compile all existing resources in one place. Designed to service residents and outside investors it is a

way for the community to show pride in their home. This project emerged as students spent time brainstorming how we could help the Arbor Hill community. Upon identifying accessibility of information on Arbor Hill was a challenge to be overcome, the students strived to tackle this problem as a group. This project that involves a multitude of stakeholders, looks to be an online focal point for the community.

The following write-up integrates the online community resource information with that of the public arts program. Because of the similar goals and mission statements, it is more efficient to proceed as thus. The remainder of this document, in addition to addressing the public arts components, looks at the steps the students took to develop the website. It will identify the partnerships they established in the process, speak about community involvement, the challenges dealt with and lessons learned. The appendix at the end will contain additional resources used and some outline charts.

Mission Statement

- Promote Arbor Hill as a place for arts, culture and heritage, recognizing the neighborhood's rich history, including the African-American experience.
- Expand public participation and foster a sense of pride in Arbor Hill through public arts.
- Working with and supporting the existing activities of various Arbor Hill stakeholders, including the Arbor Hill Implementation Team, the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association, and the Arbor Hill Community Center, Inc. to create on-going partnerships for the betterment of the community.
- To foster community pride, spirit and appreciation for the neighborhood's rich history.
- By emphasizing community participation the online community resource project sought to compile existing resources and make available new resources accessible to all.

This idea builds off of the Arts, Culture and Heritage theme which was developed as one of four major areas of focus within the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan.

Program Goals

- Encourage the expansion of arts, culture and heritage activities.
- Strengthen neighborhood ties to city and regional arts and cultural organizations and institutions.
- Increase opportunities for neighborhood youth to participate in arts and culture programs.
- Promote the neighborhood as a regional arts center and place of historic significance.
- Creation of an easily accessible and manageable online community resource for a variety of stakeholders.

Objective

- Develop a community arts program to serve as a road map for the community to use for future public arts projects in Arbor Hill.
- Develop a pilot mural to function as an example for future public arts programs within Arbor Hill and potentially the greater Albany area.
- Develop an online community resource that is accessible at:
<http://arborhillinformationny.web.officelive.com>

Action Steps-Public Arts Program

a. Research case studies

Before the initiation of the Mural Arts program the team referred to various case studies to understand similar projects carried out in other cities. Although the scope of our project was limited to a small area in the Arbor Hill Community Center, Inc., the intention was to further use this as a pilot project for a Mural Arts Program with larger scope involving the entire community. Here are some notes from the Mural Projects in Philadelphia and San Francisco.

Notes from Philadelphia Mural Project

Goals

- Reflect the culture of the community
- Engage neighborhood youth
- Develop social capital
- Contribute to community revitalization
- Address urban blight
- Include stabilization of abandoned lots / revitalization of open spaces
- Coordinate with existing strategies for community development (ex. Neighborhood plan)
- Make the neighborhood a “destination” - recognition (Zero Deflect Designs LLC, 2008)

Best Practices

Whereas the Philadelphia mural arts program (MAP) reached out across the whole city, the studio team focused on a geographic area that MAP would consider a “neighborhood site.”

- Hired a muralist to reach out to graffiti writers and redirect their energy toward mural-making; *The SUNY Artist Cooperative is collaborating and functioning as muralists for the AHCC site.*
- Established a non-profit organization; *Arbor Hill Community Center or Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association*
- Develop an Arts education program targeting under-served youth at neighborhood sites in order to:
 - Teach art
 - Promote self-confidence

- Foster life and job skills
- Taught by professional artists; *Worked to establish a partnership between the Albany Barn and the Albany Housing Authority to encourage the growth of an arts population.*
- Partnerships
- Block Captains; neighborhood association; public schools; CDCs; local non-profits; city agencies.
- Funding through local and State philanthropies
- Job Creation: MAP employs artists (became one of the largest employers in the city)
- Hold public tours of the murals and have a mailing list (Zero Deflect Designs LLC, 2008)

Notes from San Francisco – Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center

Goals

- Educate the community about the process and history of public community mural art
- “bringing art into the everyday lives of communities in a way which is meaningful to them”
- Make artwork accessible to viewers from diverse backgrounds (Precita Park Studio)

Best Practices

- Rotate murals on website: Provided an interactive aspect to look at each mural separately and learn about each site. Showed with title, author, sponsor, etc for each mural
- Weekly art classes for local youth and adults to promote art through the entire community
- Slide presentation to educators, public agencies and public school students
- Partners: national endowment for the arts; local foundations provided the means to
- Hosted “gala for the future,” a celebration celebrating the site and recognizing those who helped; *Get site designated as a stop as part of Albany's First Friday, get companies to donate food/drinks/etc for event.*
- Developed youth murals in areas in proximity to recreation; *Possibly near the basketball court that kids already use*
- Organized mural walks and hand out of good places to eat
- Created maps to catalogue murals within the area
- Included “how can I get involved” applications within the website as part of Q&A section (Precita Park Studio)

Needs/Process

- Materials

- Scaffolding, Paint, Brushes, Drop Clothes, etc.
- Average cost \$15/25 sq. ft.
- Track requests, make site visits and take accurate measurements and photographs
- Need to identify property owner and get written permission to paint (Precita Park Studio)

Others

The Hollywood Beautification Team (HBT) which is based in California is a non-profit organization which has adopted the School Murals Project, among others. HBT has adopted approximately 110 public schools involving about 27,000 children implementing 250 mural walls. (Hollywood Beautification Team)

Besides the HBT, Philadelphia and San Francisco Mural Arts Program, there are many other mural arts programs within New York State. For instance the Mural Arts program in The Evander Childs High School in Bronx which involves the school children in not just painting the murals but also for idea generation and representation of the Mural Theme. (New Deal Network)

b. Establish leaderships for future community arts projects

The team has looked to the following community organizations to provide long-term leadership and guidance for the Arbor Hill Public Arts Program.

Arbor Hill Implementation Team (AHIT)

Key Contact: Arts & Culture Committee

The AHIT is the group of individuals responsible for overseeing the realization of the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Plan. The Arts & Culture committee, which has been inactive for several years, has been identified as a key group to involve in public arts activities. While this semester’s studio group was unsuccessful at integrating this group into their Public Arts movement, they remain key players and should be contacted for guidance and assistance in future initiatives and have the capacity to be very helpful for future projects. Darin Scott and Paul Stewart in particular are two key champions of the public arts program.

New Covenant Charter School

Key Contacts: Jacrois Jean-Baptiste, Principal, Ms. Rappaport, Art Teacher

Students from the New Covenant Charter School were involved in the design competition for potential mural designs along with the AHCC, Inc. Students from grades 1-6 with the guidance of the school’s arts teacher, Mrs. Rappaport and members of the SUNY Albany Artists Cooperative cultivated the students understanding of “What Arbor Hill Means to

You” and helped them transfer their ideas into art. Mrs. Rappaport in particular stood out as someone with a great deal of experience and passion for this project.

City of Albany

Key Contact: Kathleen Bronson, Office of Community Development

Key Resource: Barbara Smith, Councilwoman

Barbara Smith is certainly a local hero and someone who is instrumental in any initiative impacting the community. She provides invaluable feedback and an important note she always stresses is the need for community involvement in any projects or decision making forums.

Kathleen Bronson served as a dependable and important resource throughout the semester, in terms of providing resources, contacts and guidance. She is an important community figure who attends both the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association and Implementation Teams’ meetings and acts as the liaison between the city and community.

c. Establish a partnership & communications with key stakeholder groups & residents

Corresponding and collaborating with local leaders and key community organizations was a vital part of the public arts efforts. The following section outlines the key players involved in the studio team's communication and provides the main contact person as well as notes on the nature of the relationship with each group or individual. Please see the appendix for a comprehensive list of the partners and contacts that were reached out to as well as their contact information.

Public Housing Authority

Key Contact: Darren Scott

Darren Scott played a strong leadership role with both the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association and Implementation Teams. He is an important facilitator of change who should be included in future conversations pertaining to our continuing mural arts program. Mr. Scott is also a key figure involved in the redevelopment occurring along North Swan street and it is because of this role that he should be considered as a contact for future initiatives along this area.

Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA)

Key Contact: Arlene Way

In 2008 Arlene Way took over the reins of the AHNA when elected President in October, 2008. The AHNA is an important forum for public involvement and feedback, as members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings and participate in events. We used this group to generate feedback and interest from the community.

Arbor Hill Community Center, Inc. (AHCC)

Key Contact: La'Keisha Hall, Lauren Ferguson, Stephanie Robinson-Brown

The AHCC has acted as the studio's key partner in the public arts studio project. Not only has this organization served as the site of our mini mural, but has also served as venue for AHNA meetings and other meetings between (if this ever happens).... Moreover, the community center houses a series of after school programs which the studio was invited to attend in order to host a design competition and allow students to learn about the project, share their ideas and create a pool of drawings. The drawings may then be presented to the governing board of the community center and possibly be selected to for the Community Center's mini mural and other future murals.

The Community Center has also committed to hosting an event celebrating the unveiling of the mini mural and the launching of the Arbor Hill website.

Trinity Institute-Homer Perkins Center Inc.

Key Contact: Harris Oberlander, Chief Executive Officer

This organization is the 'parent' organization or 'mentor' to the AHCC. Chief Executive Office Harris Oberlander is an important resource and source of leadership in the community who was involved with guiding this project.

Albany Barn

Key Contact: Jeff Mirel

This local organization represents an important resource as a group which is tapped into the local arts scene and is committed to promoting and developing art within the Arbor Hill community.

d. Liabilities

The Committee or local organization undertaking a community art project should make a good faith effort to select work that does not pose a public danger or ADA hazard. Each artist or cooperative of artists that agrees to participate in the Arbor Hill Community Arts Program agrees to hold the City of Albany, it employees and officials harmless of any liability arising from the injury of any persons involved. Appendix

e. Involve Neighborhood Youth

When creating a mural in a youth center it is vital to have that mural be one that the children who see it the most will be able to relate to. For that reason the studio team, from the outset, committed themselves to involving the children of Arbor Hill in the design process of the mural. Once the studio decided on the Arbor Hill Community Center, Inc. (AHCC) as the site of the mural a relationship between the studio and the New Covenant Charter School (NCCS) was established. The NCCS is the largest charter school in Albany and due to its location, directly across the street from the AHCC is a perfect choice of schools to hold a design competition for the mural.

Principal Jacrois Jean-Baptiste and his staff were instrumental in setting up sessions during the school day in which the studio team, and their commissioned artists, could interact directly with the students. Through the guidance of the artists and Mrs. Rappaport the studio team was able to present the most promising designs to the governing board of the AHCC. The AHCC then selected the best designs, the designs which would then be integrated within the mural by the SUNY Albany Artists Cooperative.

The Arbor Hill Community Center and its after-school arts & crafts program provided another opportunity for the studio team to involve local children in creating drawings that represented how they felt about Arbor Hill. The team worked with the program Director as well as art teachers from the NCCS for these design activities where local children drew ideas on paper which will become future murals for the community.

Through working with the school and the Artists Cooperative the studio team involved the children of Arbor Hill and kindled a sense of community pride by allowing these children to create art by using their shared experiences while living in AH.

f. Funding sources for future murals & activities

Getting local businesses to become stakeholders in this project by donating resources and materials has been an important component of this project. The team has also researched sources of other funding such as grants based on the experience of other public arts projects which have been created in Albany. A detailed list of these sources and contact information can be found in the appendix.

Wish List

- paper and pencils for design symposiums (?)
- paint
- brushes
- primer & rollers
- stencils

- tarps / drop cloths
- food / beverages / paper-ware, etc.
- money

Potential Monetary / Food Donors

- Stewarts
- Subway
- Price Chopper
- Family Dollar
- SEFCU
- Citizens Bank

Potential Donors of Art Supplies & Resources

- Upstate Artists Guild
- Central Arts Supply
- Arlene's Artist Materials
- The Albany Art Room
- Albany Institute of Art & History
- City of Albany Youth and Workforce Services

Potential Grant Sources

- NYS Council on the Arts
- SUNY Albany Foundation
- NYS Association for Arts & Education
- NYS Foundation for the Arts

g. Hold joint meetings with multiple community organizations

Collaborating with local groups has been the core focus of the project in many ways. The dialogue the team has had with different community organizations and stakeholder groups throughout the process is outlined both step #3 and the chronology of activities.

h. Identify Sites for mural(s)

The team has identified potential sites that would make great sites for future murals based on walking around the neighborhood. A list of potential sites can be found in Appendix B

i. Develop Potential Themes for mural(s)

In an area such as Arbor Hill which is so rich in history and culture the studio team decided that they would use the history of Arbor Hill as a platform to improving its future. Whether it was the active role AH played in the Underground Railroad or residents such as Henry Johnson, a true American Hero, Arbor Hill has a rich enough history to help inspire a mural within the AHCC.

That said being, there were other themes that the studio team felt important and therefore incorporated into their sessions with the children. Ideals such as Pride, Community and Equality were just a few of the principles the NCCS, AHCC hold dear and are therefore the perfect themes to incorporate into future murals.

j. *Create drawings for the mural(s) (student design activities)*

A series of drawing activities have been scheduled as an opportunity for students to express what Arbor Hill means to them. The creation of drawings developed around the themes noted above will serve as the basis for the community center and future murals. The team has worked with the Community Center's after school program to create a series of drawings and has also planned a similar event with the New Covenant Charter School students. "Show and tell" activities will be incorporated into this process as a means of getting the students to open up and tell their story.

However, it is important to note that what was initially intended to be a design competition has evolved into a community activity that would bring students and parents together to exchange stories and learn about local experiences and the true meaning of community for neighborhood. Saturday was chosen for this event as we wanted to provide a large enough time block to make this activity meaningful and effective. Food and, ideally, transportation will be provided and local historians will be invited to speak on local history. Parents, Mrs. Rappaport and the SUNY artists will also be on hand to guide students in what will ultimately be an opportunity to produce drawings for the mural.

k. *Solicit artists to work on the mural(s) – potential artist groups*

The team has connected with the following artists groups who are interested in contributing their expertise to mural projects in the community:

Black Dimensions in Art (BDA)

Key Contact: Michael K. Wilson

The BDA, represented by Michael Wilson was instrumental in helping our team develop a process that could complete a mural that captures the local youth's imagination and vision while also painting a mural that appears professional and is completed in a timely fashion. With their invaluable guidance and ideas, the BDA is a group that could serve as possible leaders in a prolonged Public Arts Program for the greater Arbor Hill area.

SUNY Albany Artists Cooperative

Key Contact: Monica Jerminario

Under the leadership of SUNY Albany student Monica Jerminario, the Artists Cooperative is an organization of diverse and “artistically salient” undergraduate students who have volunteered to create the Community Center mural and have expressed interest in providing long-term leadership on this project. The artists have a great deal of expertise and a myriad of creative ideas for expressing community values and stories through art. (SUNY Albany Artist Cooperative)

Upstate Artist Guild (UAG)

Key Contact: Krista Dijstelberge

The Upstate Artists Guild is a not-for-profit volunteer organization. This organization promotes the appreciation, practice, and enjoyment of art. UAG works to promote art education and artistic endeavors throughout the community; to maintain a space in which to meet for the purpose of exhibitions, lectures, and instruction; and to work with the community to stimulate an interest in the arts.

Chronology of Activities

I. Public Arts

Spring 2008	-Attended AHNA and AHIT Meetings. Introduced the studio and laid the groundwork for future collaboration -Met St. Rose students working on market study
Sept 3	Studio: discussed highlights in AH Neighborhood Plan and initial project ideas
Sept 9	AHIT meeting; connected with Paul Stewart
Sept 10	Studio: Created project teams; developed rough plan and time-frame Conference call with BS and KB Created Google docs account for central communication & information repository
Sept 17	Studio: Refined work plan
September	Initiated initial correspondence with key community leaders and organizations

Developed mission statement, program plan of action and branding

Oct 3 First Friday Event – survey/feedback form; developed local relationships
(Helped set-up the week prior; developed relationship with Jeff Mirel & Michael Wilson)

Oct 15 Studio: Visited Arbor Hill and met with Community Center; developed relationship and
Identified indoor wall as site for mini mural; met with NCCS and established relationship

Oct 22 Studio: site visit to Arbor Hill

Oct 26 AHNA Meeting: Presented refined work plans and sought community feedback

Oct 29 Studio

Nov 5 Studio: Met with Michael Wilson; discussed drawing logistics; recruited artists

Nov 12 Studio: Design Competition at community center
Nov 19 Studio

Nov 10 Met with Principal of NCCC (Prep meeting before presenting to BOD)

Nov 13 Present project proposal to NCCC Board of Directors

Nov 16 Met with Michael to discuss artists; met as a group to prepare for upcoming
AHIT meeting to organize handouts, etc.

Nov 17 Meeting of the Minds (AHIT Arts & Culture Committee & other key leaders)

Nov 24 AHNA Meeting
Met with selected member of the SUNY Albany Artists Cooperative

Nov 25 Met with Ms. Rappaport from NCCC to discuss design competition and mural logistics

Pending	Drawing selections Prep Night(s) Painting (how many?) Follow up meeting and training
Dec 3	Final Studio Class Session
Dec 9	Presentation to CDPA
Dec 16	AHNA Meeting
Jan 10	Drawing event with NCCS: create drawings, share local stories,
Mid to Late Jan	Execution in collaboration with the SUNY Artist Coop
Late Jan/Early Feb	Celebration Event: Unveiling/launching

II. Chronology of Activities-Online Community Resource

Spring 2008 Attended AHNA and AHIT Meetings:

- Introduced the studio and laid the groundwork for future collaboration
- Met with St Rose students working on market study

SEPTEMBER

Sept 3 Studio discussed highlights in AH Neighborhood Plan and initial project ideas

Sept 10 Studio created project teams, developed rough plan and time-frame

Sept 17 Studio finalized website sections and assigned initial research for the sections

Sept 24 Studio-->Class trip to Arbor Hill to take pictures for the website,
continued website section research

September Overview

- Initiated initial correspondence with key community leaders and organizations
- Developed mission statement, program plan of action and branding
- Created sectional layout for the Website
- Created googledocs account for central communication & information repository

OCTOBER

Oct 15 Studio began Website construction and finished gathering sectional information

Oct 22 Studio continued Website construction

Oct 29 Studio continued Website construction

October Overview

- October 3 First Friday Event – survey/feedback form, developed local relationships, and began developing opening page “Welcome to Arbor Hill” collage (helped set-up the week prior; developed relationship with Jeff & Mike)
- October 26 Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association Meeting – Presented refined work plans and sought community feedback
- Began finalizing information and construction of the Website

NOVEMBER

Nov 5 Studio continued Website construction and information revision/feedback
Nov 12 Studio continued Website construction and corrections
Nov 19 Studio website completion, email stakeholders to gain feedback and make corrections

November Overview

- Completion of Website-including feedback and corrections
- November 24 Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association Meeting

DECEMBER and BEYOND

Dec 3 Final Studio finalized product of website available and finalized semester report completed
Dec 16 AHIT Meeting @ 9am
Dec 9 CDPA Luncheon Presentation of Project
Dec 22 AHNA Meeting @ 6pm
Dec/Jan Celebration Eventà Unveiling/launching of all the studio projects

Lessons Learned and Recommendations-Public Arts

This studio project was truly a learning experience for ‘the real world.’ The group found that communication and partnership to be both the most important part of this project as well as the most challenging. The arts teamed focused much of their energy on identifying and reaching out to community organizations, local schools and key leaders in the community. The group and their plan was well received time after time, but often found it challenging to coordinate schedules and set up meetings. Some of our lessons learned include:

- Initiate communication early, be persistent, and most importantly use different types of media
- (phone calls are important – emails only go so far!)
- Know who your key players are and allow them to guide you
- Get the experts on board early on in the game, in this case, artists; they provide invaluable information

- Use the expertise of artists to work with students to express concepts such as community and pride into drawings

Working with young children and getting them to understand abstract ideas of community and pride was difficult and our efforts were initially met with drawings of buildings. After discussing these challenges with art groups, we were able to develop strategies such as incorporating a "show and tell" into the activities to more effectively capture the themes that had been identified for the mural. The cooperative and Ms. Rappaport were well equipped in this process of "speaking the kids' language" and we greatly benefited from their involvement.

While communication was perhaps our greatest challenge, meeting with key partners face-to-face was instrumental in generating ideas, refining ideas and getting feedback for moving forward. For example, the initial idea for a public arts program was generated after attending a series of Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association meetings to better understand the community and its dreams. Meetings with Councilwoman Barbara Smith and members of the AHIT team reinforced the importance of community involvement, a major impetus for the SUNY students' involvement with the Summer in the City October event at St. Josephs church, where the team was able to meet local residents and get their ideas as well as meet local artists such as Michael Wilson from Black Dimensions in Art who were able to provide leadership and expertise down the road.

The team has also learned the importance of building and maintaining a relationship with the City of Albany, in particular the Office of Development & Planning/Neighborhood Revitalization, where Kathleen Bronson has been constant source of guidance and feedback... This relationship has been a crucial one in propelling the group forward and getting us in touch with the right people. This is also important for building a long-term relationship between the Department of Geography and Planning and the City of Albany, for future studio projects as well as other initiatives.

Community involvement is also a cornerstone of studio projects and community feedback has been both instrumental in moving the project forward as well as under-utilized in this semester's project. Attending neighborhood association meetings was a great way of learning about the community, their values and challenges, and can certainly be considered a best practice. Bringing these dialogues and conversations more directly into the project is a challenge we continue to work on in our final stages of process and encourage future studios to establish early on.

While setting meeting dates, getting all of the key players to the same table at the same time and following up with individuals has been challenging, we have learned that this process is critical, takes time and paves the path for future studio groups. It is our recommendation that the University consider making Arbor Hill a permanent or long-term studio project in order for future groups of students to bypass the communication we experienced; now that the ball is rolling, it is our hope that it will continue to roll and pick up speed over time!

Lessons Learned and Recommendations-Online Community Resource

- *Obtaining community feedback and other challenges with communication.*

Throughout the entirety of the project, we continually asked for community feedback. However we received little or no suggestions. We found it was hard to engage the community when there is no finished project. Perhaps a better way to approach this would have been to create the finished product and ask for feedback afterwards. Additionally if more time had been allotted for the project we could have done interviews of various stakeholders to ask them what their needs were in terms of resources.

It was also difficult to make contact with community stakeholders. Each person had a very different schedule and it was oftentimes very challenging to set a time to meet. Using programs like Lotus Notes meeting scheduler would have been very beneficial, that way we could have seen everyone's schedule in one place and figured out better times to meet. Having meetings with themes like "the paper bag lunch" or "bring your own dinner" might have also been a useful tool for us to use.

- *What information to include online and how to include it.*

When creating a database of information it is difficult to decide what to include. This is even more difficult if you are a group coming in from the outside. Brainstorming ideas about what to include on the website was very beneficial, but it would have been more effective if we had more community participation in the process.

After deciding what information we wanted to include on the website we had the challenge of researching the various topics on our own. We found difficulty in how we should present the information. It was easy to forget that we were creating a product and that it needed to be of high quality. Plagiarism and paraphrasing were not acceptable for this website. After discussing this as a group we were able to make the necessary changes to our information and were able to present the community with a high-quality product.

- *Finding time to meet as a team.*

It was also challenging to find time to meet as a group. Many of us being full-time graduate students, having at least part-time jobs, and lives outside of school or work made the issue of setting up meetings very difficult. Each of us had classes, work, and appointments at different times. It was very challenging to set times to me and when we did, it was usually late at night.

It might be more beneficial to have two studio meetings a week, instead of just one class session for three hours on Wednesdays. It would be even more useful if one meeting was

on Monday and one was on Thursday, that way there was time in between each session to get various tasks accomplished.

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