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Boomerang Studio: Community Design for Action

Jessica Walton

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Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the IDES faculty and staff, especially my advisors, Christina Lafazani, Roberto Ventura, Emily Smith, Rob Smith + Hillary Fields. Your support and feedback has been integral in developing my skills and interests as a designer. A special thanks to Carla Mae Crookendale for the research assistance.

So much appreciation and admiration for my classmates. Your individual styles have made for an interesting, thoughtful and often a laughter filled experience.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends. I am lucky to continually be loved and supported by such great people.
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Design should excite, motivate, develop, engage and inspire.

Design is layered. It has no end. It touches every aspect of life and in this way, design changes our concept of time. Design increases productivity or asks to savor the moment.

Design is a call to action. To beautify, to contemplate, to educate. To re-imagine the past or create for the future.

To craft an experience using hand, body and mind. To engage the senses.

Design constantly assesses human while building off the past. Ultimately, design benefits the user. A designer must show an understanding of the user’s connection to the space within the design.

A designer’s character is reflected in their design. Therefore, one must pursue design with honesty and intention.

Design has the ability to spark discussion.

To engage others in questions of how. To create an environment that calms, supports, or energizes.

Design has the ability to give a voice to those who are underrepresented. In this way, design empowers.

“My goal is to make furniture that people can be comfortable living with. If you’re not preoccupied with making an impact with your designs, chances are something that looks good today will look good tomorrow.”

Sam Maloof

manifesto
Methods
Numerous case studies and literature reviews make an argument supporting the belief that students benefit in many ways from arts education and design thinking. Reviewing statistics on the availability of arts programs in public schools further proves the importance of these programs. Interviews and peer reviewed writings address the importance of diversity within design and the means of achieving greater representation for marginalized designers.

Results
“…African-Americans are approximately 13.5% of the nation’s population…The number of black registered architects who are members of the American Institute of Architects currently is barely 1%.”

Architects, designers and educators such as Jack Travis explain that within design there is a lack of representation which creates tension between white peers who struggle to engage in conversations of inclusion. There are very few initiatives within the design community to engage in this topic or encourage different voices to join the profession.

Design should address multiple experiences, yet it draws primarily from the dominant culture. Much like arts education, design thinking teaches key skills that transfer to a variety of situations beyond design. These skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal relationships, risk-taking and the ability to communicate with peers and laymen, are critical in navigating the adult world. Programs that aim to teach design thinking to low income communities might provide students skills that will aid them later in life, which will also increase diversity within the profession. Additionally, these programs would expose underserved communities to design opportunities, potentially answering the need for greater diversity in design.

Conclusions
Students who develop design thinking skills become more engaged in the education and creative processes. They have more positive conflict management and communication skills, which influence their interactions in other situations outside these programs.
Decline of Arts Education in Underserved Populations

Diversity of Interior Design Professionals in Comparison to U.S. Population
case studies
Studio H

Studio H is a public school studio class modeled after a design-build style of design discovery. The program creates real-world projects for middle + high school students in communities that lack interactive, design-thinking based curriculums. Through the Studio H class, students learn the design process as projects begin imagined and followed through to creation.

Program founder, Emily Pilloton breaks down the curriculum into six design directives:

- Design through action
- Design with, not for
- Design systems, not stuff
- Document, share, measure
- Start locally = scale globally
- Build

And approaches the integration of education and design as a means of fostering community by addressing the overlap in these main ways:

Design for Education. Addressing the spaces, materials and experience within an occupied area.

Redesigning Education. Looking at how education is administered, what is offered and to whom. In other words, providing opportunities for change and the motivation for those involved to want change.

Design as Education. Teaching and learning “design thinking, coupled with real contractors and fabrication skills put towards a local community purpose.” As well as, enabling the critical studio environment with a shop-based class to apply core class skills.

How does Studio H inform the program for spark?

Studio H addresses many of the themes within spark’s program. It focuses on the same demographics—middle + high school aged students, with particular attention to girls and students of color. Showing them the ways they can use their core subjects to generate an interest in the exploration of spaces and how things are made, while emphasizing the local community for which the students are designing.

Studio H pushes students to think critically = encourages self-expression through these community based projects. The Studio H curriculum celebrates independent critical thinking, experimentation and helps to foster confidence through a sense of accomplishment = new understanding.

Students learn critical thinking, collaboration and verbal communication skills which are vital in the working world. Studio H’s year-long curriculum teaches students the order of hard work, hands-on learning and craftsmanship.
The Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership

Studio Gang Architects
Completed 2014
Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan

This building was designed with diversity in mind. It is meant to engage the community in conversations about social justice. It does so by creating an interior space that is open and communal with pathways and sunken areas that are inviting spaces for conversation. Furthermore, it creates a direct connection between the dialogue happening within the building to the communities outside the building. Each arm of the building overlooks landscape particular to the college community. City, grove and campus are visually connected to the heart of the building through these sight lines and place all 3 as equally important.
MVRDV's design for the new office building of a broadcasting company sought to create an interconnected space that changed elevation through a variety of means beyond the standard staircase. The designers employed ramps, stepped floors, and grand staircases—also used as alternative seating areas—to connect the 4 floors of the building.

Additionally, the building's design brings the exterior lines into the space, extending the curves of the facade through to the interior of the office, making a strong connection to the outside. This technique also capitalizes on the desire to create a flow throughout the building from level to level. The use of concrete to call out the strong geometry of the space creates a continuity of flow from exterior to interior.
Neighborhood

Randolph is an historically black middle class neighborhood. The area is named after Virginia E. Randolph, an African-American woman who was a prominent educator in the Richmond area during the 19th century. The neighborhood is flanked by The Fan, Oregon Hill and Maymont. The close vicinity of VCU creates an opportunity for engagement between VCU students and the Randolph community.

In the early 1970's, a group of neighborhood activists worked closely with the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) to rebuild the neighborhood. Much of the area was razed and redeveloped, which caused many older residents to leave the neighborhood.

In response to concerns of gentrification, the redevelopment originally called for a large amount of low income housing. However, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) thought a high volume of low income housing in one area would create a concentration of people with minimal resources and the plan had to be reworked.

1981 saw the creation of new public housing and Section 8 subsidized rentals for low income residents. However, interest had been building for the development of private homes. This caused RRHA and HUB to reassess their plan.

The new development plan was tagged as, “build a neighborhood, not a project”. It’s aim was to create a mixed income neighborhood. Initially, the original community disapproved of the plan. Following numerous community meetings, residents agreed to the new development plan.

The community was designed by UDA Architects. They focused on creating to foster the current community. The development called for three parks, which created generously spaced and three home buyers who were concerned about a lack of green space in urban environments.

Currently, some of these浏览器 still live in Randolph. However, the site has changed. Many homes have been purchased by investors and subsequently rented to VCU students. The changes in the area have taken away from the community that residents fought hard to develop.

Site

1911 W. Main St. was built in 1950, serving the local community for a number of years. The building became home to a number of tenants over the years and the space operated as a brewery until 2014 when the building was sold. In 2015, Martini Kitchen and Bubble Bar opened, closing its doors in November 2014. In 2015, Martini Kitchen and Bubble Bar opened, closing its doors in November 2014. In summer 2015, it reopened as District 5.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Randolph Community Center

Amenia Street School

Virginia Commonwealth University

Randolph

Maymont Elementary

Clark Springs Elementary

Site

area history
site study
parti diagrams
initial programming
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<th>Design Studios</th>
<th>Wood Shop</th>
<th>Metal Shop</th>
<th>Gallery</th>
<th>Reception</th>
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<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>Two spaces where designers + students gather to explore design projects.</td>
<td>Space for cutting wood pieces, blank by design. Vises + machinery.</td>
<td>Space for cutting metal pieces, flat by design. Vises + machinery.</td>
<td>Used to display student work + group projects by visual artists. Students as critique space.</td>
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design process

- conceptual
- schematic
- design development
Conceptual design began with the 30x30x30 project. Creating a series of 2D images and 3D models drawing on important concepts within the research led to discoveries about the orientation of interior space. Work was largely inspired by a series of drivers related to the aspirations of the project.

“For a songwriter, you don’t really go to songwriting school; you learn by listening to tunes. And you try to understand them and take them apart and see what they’re made of, and wonder if you can make one, too.”

- Tom Waits
Taking important discoveries from the 30x30x30 exercise and diving deeper into the conceptual exploration of certain drivers led to a series of 2D and 3D pieces. The example below looks at the wealth and ownership. In researching the lack of diversity in design and the societal influences for this, an understanding of wealth and income inequity played an important role.
Conceptual studies of spaces within the building. Looking at types of spaces, light and function.
Concept

Education is a constant give and take. Educators give themselves to educate the young because they value a community of informed citizens and realize the importance of each child receiving an education as it has been an important path for their own opportunity.

Despite this selflessness, students don’t always reciprocate. They lack life experiences or have been taught to value alternatives to education. Educators know that the return for investing in their students now is a future with more engaged, thoughtful adults.
The schematic design process started with general diagrams of the anticipated areas within the building and developed into solidified plans, sections and elevations. Over the course of the schematic phase, original programming changed as new ideas were generated. The wood and metal shops became a single shop space. A second level was added with pin up and critique space. Additionally, the gallery space was redesigned to be an open area and was moved to the middle of the building.
design development

Honing in on a spatial layout, bringing concept into FF+E and developing a variety of drawings to express the nature of the space were the main focuses of the design development phase. Much of the time spent was going over previous iterations of drawings to tighten the link between concept and physical space.
presentation content
Axon cut through window of ribbon

Axon cut through window of ribbon

Axon cut through bench of ribbon

Magnetic glassboard

Bench with 5" birch plywood ribbons

Window

Ribbon

Level 2 Seating + Stair Section

Critique Area + Community Stair

Studio Ribbon Wall Elevation

Level 2 Seating + Stair Section

Critique Area + Community Stair

Studio Ribbon Wall Elevation

Level 2 Seating + Stair Section

Critique Area + Community Stair

Studio Ribbon Wall Elevation
Reception,
A bright area welcoming families, students and other guests. Furnishings within reception and throughout the building aim to showcase classic and modern pieces within the design world to be used as precedents for students learning in the space.

FF+E

Polygon Wire table | Herman Miller | Studio 7.5
Linna chair | Alberto Vitello
Optical Light pendant | Lee Broom
Tropicalia lounge chair | Patricia Urquiola
Eames Wire Base Low table | Herman Miller | Charles + Ray Eames
A continuous ribbon of birch plywood frames the studio entrances, then runs through the space using rectilinear lines and turning corners to become various surfaces with which users can engage.

MATERIALS

- Clarus Glassboards
  - Magnetic, Pop teal
- Plexwood
  - Birch, oil/wax finish
- Birch plywood
Studio

Open area with large work surfaces. Brightly lit by large storefront windows. Looking out onto W. Main St., the activity within the studios creates a dialogue with pedestrians, drawing them into explore the space.

Mayline Ranger Drafting table

Quick Task | Steelcase

Shortcut stool | Steelcase

Nelson X-leg table | Herman Miller | George Nelson

FF+E
The open gallery creates a series of moments throughout the circulation space. Showcasing student work in multiple areas of the space aims to foster community and confidence in the students. A multi-use staircase provides opportunity for students to connect with their peers through conversation.

Stool 60 | Alvar Aalto
Critique Area

The second level provides pin-up and critique space for students, as well as a variety of areas to engage with each other on projects. The ribbon runs through this space creating opportunities for student engagement through rectilinear geometries.

FF+EE

MATERIALS

Plexwood
Okoume, oil/wax finish

High Stool 64 | Alvar Aalto

76 77
show
opening
“African-American”, “inclusive”, “designers”

Design Thinking


The primary source touching on the subject of diversity, racial diversity, Hispanic, African American, and Latino are the VCU Full-time Instructional Faculty,

Pratt Institute 2014-2015 Undergraduate.


MOOS is also supported by Alex Gilliam, a designer based in Philadelphia, PA who has founded multiple initiatives in his city—public workshop and Tiny WPA—that promote the creation of objects and spaces made by and for residents in the area.22,23 Many of these recently opened community art spaces have begun to take on new roles as spaces for both creativity and organizing for social justice.24,

A study published by the Southern Education Foundation in January 2015 found 39 percent of Virginia public school students in 2013 received any arts education, whereas 72 percent of white students received any arts education.25

However, more steps need to be taken to increase minority representation within higher education programs.4,26

Students from underserved communities are often those who receive the most benefit from arts programs.4,27,28

Arts programs serve as important stepping stones for exploring careers in design.5

Through in-school or community-based programs, urban youth in low income communities are being given skills in design and problem—solving by means of risk-taking as an enlightening journey toward socially and economically impactful design.6

A human-centered design philosophy pushes design students to take action. Problem-solving through multiple iterations of an idea teaches students that a failed attempt is not a failure, but a valuable learning experience.7,8,9 Design thinking allows students to hone their interpersonal skills by listening to others, empathizing with their predicaments, and working with them to create a solution.10

“Start locally + scale globally”

The design profession is still predominantly white in comparison to the U.S. Population.11

As of 2015, the AIA’s 2015 workforce study found that 73.6% of architects were white, 15.0% black, 10.0% Hispanic/Latino, and 0% African American.12

This workforce reflects the demographics of the American Architectural Association, which indicates that 12.4% of the U.S. population is black; 16.3% Hispanic/Latino; and 5.0% African American.13

2016 Design Intelligence ranked #3 undergraduate interior design program in the U.S.20

Pratt Institute 2014-2015 Undergraduate Design Intelligence ranked #6 undergraduate architecture program in the U.S.10

Start locally + scale globally

African American

Hispanic/Latino

White

Two or more races

Non-Hispanic

5% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

 UCLA Faculty Headcount by Race 2014-2015

A letter written by ASID to the U.S. Senate Committee Members: Emily Smith and Hillary Fayle

Committee Members: Emily Smith and Hillary Fayle

Jessie Walton

20. “ASID Statement for the Record to the US Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Oversight.” Randy Fiser to U.S. Senator


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A study published by the Southern Education Foundation in January 2015 found 39 percent of Virginia public school students in 2013 were from low-income families. Aarts found that these underserved communities are provided less access to arts education. Arts education has been shown to help at-risk communities develop more engaged students.

Project H: A Case Study

Located in a public high school, the Project H program consists of two design cycles: a fall cycle where students are introduced to design thinking, and a spring cycle where students work to identify and visualize ideas. Each cycle includes a year-long studio class, a summer camp for girls, and a design competition.

The program works to expose students to design thinking by engaging them in hands-on design processes. Students gain confidence in their ability to solve problems and think critically through these projects, which encourages self-expression through these community-based projects.

Program founder, Emily Pilloton breaks down the curriculum into six design directives:

1. Start locally + scale globally
2. Build
3. Design with, not for
4. Design systems, not stuff
5. Addressing the spaces, materials and experience within an occupied area.
6. Teaching and learning, “design thinking, coupled with real construction and fabrication skills put towards a local community purpose.”

As well as, melding the critical aspects of design education through a community-based pedagogy. Project H focuses on design thinking, coupled with real construction and fabrication skills put towards a local community purpose.

Over 600 students ages 9-17 have participated in a Project H initiative. Of girls attending Camp H, 91% feel more confident, creative and excited about school following the experience.

Reproductive Politics and the Discipline

”When Americans are asked what they are most proud of, the U.S. military tops the list. The national pride in our country’s armed forces is understandable. But when Americans are asked what they are most proud of when it comes to U.S. metropolitan areas, the results are quite different. The same pride and admiration that we have for our armed forces is not shared for their neighbors in the city. Americans have a strong sense of pride in their military service, but they have little pride in their city design and architecture.

Project 5: Infrastructure

The program focuses on the development of infrastructure projects, where students work to design and implement solutions to real-world problems. The program provides hands-on experience in collaboration and teamwork, while emphasizing the local community for which the students are designing. Project 5 pushes students to think creatively and critically, encouraging self-expression through these community-based projects.

Project 6: Community

Community Focus

All students received training in the use of a 3D computer-aided design (CAD) software, enabling them to design and model their projects on a computer. The curriculum emphasizes hands-on design processes, teaching students how to think creatively and critically, encouraging self-expression through these community-based projects.

Project 2: Project H

In 2013, 19.3% of the nation’s population were black registered architects who are members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The number of black registered architects who are members of the AIA has increased since 2008, when the number was 15.7%. However, more steps need to be taken to increase minority representation within higher education institutions that promote diversity within design.

Several initiatives to promote diversity within design are popping up across the U.S. and engaging young men and women in interior design. Initiatives that promote diversity within design are popping up across the U.S. and engaging young men and women in interior design.

Project 8: Community

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Students

While they need to have a high motivation to design, students also need the tools to develop creative, critical thinking and the means to develop their ideas.

The Pre-Health Foundation is an organization that provides a comprehensive pre-health education program for students interested in pursuing a career in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and other health care professions. The program offers a holistic approach to health care, including an emphasis on the social and emotional well-being of students.

A study found that 49% of adults in the U.S. are at least “mostly satisfied” with their jobs, while 45% are “very satisfied.” This suggests that while many people are content with their careers, there is room for improvement in terms of job satisfaction.

The primary source touching on the subject of design is the AIA’s “Embedding Practices O.” Design Education: Addressing the overlap in three main ways.

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