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Iowa State University College of Design

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Community Design Lab

Combining local knowledge and experience with design research expertise to create more resilient communities
Two-dozen College of Design students spent spring semester stepping out of the hypothetical and into the actual in three southwestern Iowa communities.

Working with Clarinda, Red Oak and Shenandoah, students in the Retail Scapes option studio class developed design concepts to enhance local retail experiences. And what started as individual community storefronts and streetscapes evolved into a regional vision with connections and collaborations that can strengthen the area’s economy.

“These three communities didn’t know what they wanted and didn’t know how to start. We’re the starting point,” said interior design lecturer Lisa Bates, who taught the class with landscape architecture lecturer Tom Neppl.

Bates—who splits her time between the classroom and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development—and Neppl developed the class in conjunction with ISU Extension and Outreach’s Iowa Retail Initiative (IRI). The retail program connects the university with communities to support Iowa’s independent retailers and revitalize rural downtowns.

“With a class, we only have a semester and can only accomplish so much,” Bates said. “Through the IRI, the products at the end of the class can be disseminated. So the ideas, best practices and precedent studies can serve as tools and templates that another town can adapt.”

Complex and complementary
The multidisciplinary class included students from architecture, interior design and landscape architecture. During the semester, the students made three trips to the communities to learn about the strengths, needs and goals of each. They engaged in the design process with task forces made up of chamber of commerce leaders, community volunteers, local retailers and others who share a stake in the area’s future. And they learned that the housing, retail, education and recreation in a town or region are intertwined. The quality of one impacts the other, Bates said, and all must be considered together.

“Students are seeing connections for a growing, unified region,” Bates said. “They’re asking, ‘what about this region would attract people from Omaha or Council Bluffs to visit?’”

The students found their answer to that question in each community’s rich history, environmental heritage and fine arts culture. Inspired by the area’s musical tradition, the class proposed an overarching theme for the region, “Harmony in the Heartland.”

Define and design
The Omaha architecture firm Alley, Poyner, Macchietto Architecture sees potential in southwest Iowa. They’ve set up shop in Red Oak, with architects Daric O’Neal and Jason Wheeler dividing their time between the two locations. Wheeler is completing a facade improvement project on 32 buildings around the town square. And he’s been an adviser to the students.

“The unique thing about this studio is that the students aren’t really given a specific design problem. They’re told, ‘here’s a community with challenges and opportunities and you can do some sort of design intervention,’” Wheeler said. “So they have to develop their own problem and solve it.”

The students realized they were having an uncommon studio experience,
learning about community dynamics and discovering the potential for their design careers to impact a community. They learned how to listen to a client and how to determine clients’ needs without the convenience of a checklist of specifics.

And their design concepts were broad in content. From a regional marketing program that features websites, coupons from across communities and a shared calendar of events ... to a downtown dinner theater for Clarinda’s local theater group ... to enhancements that create usable outdoor public space for Red Oak’s main square ... to pop-up retail shops for vacant buildings to food co-ops that create a network for locally grown food.

Bike and shop in Shenandoah

Two landscape architecture seniors, David Anderson from Cambridge, Wis., and Katherine Forerster from Mound, Minn., took advantage of one of the region’s existing recreational features, the Wabash Trace Nature Trail.

Following the former Wabash Railroad corridor, the 63-mile-long trail winds from the outskirts of Council Bluffs southeast to the small town of Blanchard near the Missouri border. It crosses a corner of Shenandoah.

“We want to bring the trail into the community, connect it to the downtown retail area and then to an abandoned mill building,” Anderson said. This will make it easier for cyclists in the region to tap into a popular, weekly 14-mile bike ride from Council Bluffs to Silver City, the Taco Ride.

Anderson and Foerster initially envisioned the mill building as a bike rental/sale/repair shop. As the project developed, they added a park with Frisbee golf and a winter ice rink for seasonal activities. The bike shop idea expanded in scope to include additional sporting goods and skating lessons.

A trio of tailor-made cafes

Architecture senior Bobbi Jo Reiff, Farley, Iowa, teamed with interior design seniors Shelby Gagnon, Plainfield, Ill., and Gretchen Frank, Mt. Prospect, Ill., to create unique cafes for vacant buildings in each community. Each cafe relates thematically to the region’s railroad history and responds to community needs, such as a multigenerational gathering place or evening destinations for couples and families.

Reiff’s concept was a gourmet ice cream shop in Clarinda featuring multigenerational board games. For Shenandoah, Gagnon proposed a cafe-library with an industrial feel. Frank’s idea was a wine-tasting/art and music cafe for Red Oak.

A fresh start

“They bring a lot of creativity and a fresh eye to the communities,” said Wheeler, their local architect/mentor. “And they’ve developed some creative and innovative ways to bring some retail opportunities and attention to these three communities.”

Shelly Smith, marketing director for the Shenandoah Chamber and Industry Association, likes “the out-of-the-box ideas.”

“We are looking for ideas to help promote our music history with the Everly Brothers and others. The harmony theme for our towns is a good one.”

Elaine Farwell, executive director of the Clarinda Chamber of Commerce, said she’s excited by the potential for the students’ work and “extremely impressed” with all the projects because they could be implemented in any of the three communities.

“My goal is to meet with regional chambers, collaborate on the theme and hopefully work from there,” Farwell said.

And that’s exactly the outcome hoped for.

“We’re there to help with ideas,” Bates said. “But we can’t go with them to the finish line.”

An arts hub for Clarinda

Interior design senior Alexis Rokes, Cedar Falls, Iowa, and architecture senior Stacy Falesch, Minocqua, Wis., have big plans for renovating the vacant Page County Bank building in Clarinda. They proposed converting the historic building into a regional arts center with a gallery, studios for local artists and workshop space for educational programs.

A vacant lot behind the building would be developed as a sculpture garden. And they even suggested ideas for community arts projects for all three towns like murals, sidewalk chalk art and ice sculptures.

A trio of cafes proposed for vacant buildings in the communities. Top left by Shelby Gagnon, above left by Gretchen Frank, and above right by Bobbi Jo Reiff.
When Jason Grimm graduated *magna cum laude* with honors from Iowa State in 2009, he could have accepted a job anywhere.

With a double major in landscape architecture and environmental studies and an impressive student record of accomplishment—including a senior thesis on food urbanism, an internship with a venerable Chicago landscape architecture firm and a President’s Award for Academic Excellence from the Iowa chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects—Grimm was poised to storm the professional circles of both coasts.

Instead, he chose to stay in Iowa, where he has spent the past five years as the food system planner for Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development (IVRC&D), a nonprofit organization serving Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Linn, Poweshiek and Tama counties and the Meskwaki Nation.

“My primary charge when I was hired was to lead focus groups to put together a strategic food system plan for the IVRC&D,” Grimm said. Within that plan, he has focused on improving the viability of food producers in the region and increasing the availability of local food.

**Passion for planning**

Grimm’s passion for urban planning and food systems stems from his college experience. He was a member of the ISU Council on Sustainability and ISU chapter of the Real Food Challenge, a national student movement that advocates for healthy, just and sustainable food on college campuses.

Following an independent study on regional government in Iowa and the U.S., he enrolled in a National Student Exchange to study urban planning for a semester at Portland State University in Oregon and learn how regional government affects their local food system.

“I was interested in how food relates to the organization of a city and how it becomes infrastructure that transforms the urban experience,” he said.

While in Portland, Grimm wrote successful proposals for a Barbara King Landscape Architecture Scholarship for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and a University Honors Project Grant from Iowa State to fund research for his senior thesis on food urbanism.

Through his research, “I came to think of food as a utility—like electricity, water and gas—for which we need to plan infrastructure. As cities expand, governments should plan for a food production piece, as they would set aside spaces for parks and schools,” he said.

Getting involved with ISU’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture helped Grimm connect with the Regional Food Systems Working Group and the Iowa Valley RC&D, which was looking to hire a full-time food coordinator.

“When they offered me the job, I changed the position to food system planner because that’s how I see my role.”

**Food system planner**

As the IVRC&D’s food system planner, Grimm leads the Regional Food Initiative, which includes projects like developing the online Iowa Farm to School Toolkit; establishing a food enterprise center for Johnson and Linn counties; hosting an annual food summit of local producers and purchasers; collecting regional food-system metrics; and organizing workshops to help beginning farmers and ranchers with business planning and product marketing.

Top and above: Jason and Hannah (Brumwell) Grimm grow black turtle beans, potatoes and other produce for sale to restaurants and food co-ops. All photos courtesy of Jason Grimm.
Grimm also coordinates the Iowa Corridor Food and Agriculture Coalition, a group that’s working to build a sustainable food and agriculture system in the IVRC&D region as well as Cedar, Jones and Washington counties.

He also helps counties establish food policy councils, appointed groups that represent different food-system sectors and advise the boards of supervisors about new policies and development incentives they could implement.

**Drawing from experience**

In addition to his work with the IVRC&D, Grimm is co-founder and manager of the Iowa Valley Food Co-op, a web-based cooperative through which members can order products from area farmers and businesses and pick them up at a distribution center in Cedar Rapids.

“Our mission is to increase the resiliency of the local food system in eastern Iowa by developing the market, increasing the sale and building the infrastructure for fresh, fairly priced, sustainably produced food in our region,” Grimm said.

The co-op opened in August 2011 and is now a year-round outlet with more than 65 vendor members selling to hundreds of consumers.

Grimm and his wife, Hannah (Brumwell) (BS 2008 Marketing), also help run the Grimm Family Farm south of Williamsburg with his parents and grandparents. The couple raises pastured poultry and grows black turtle beans, potatoes and a variety of other produce on eight acres of the 125-acre farm.

“We process our own chickens and customers pick them up directly from the farm. We’re the largest grower of black beans in Iowa. We sell to restaurants, Iowa Valley Food Co-op, New Pioneer Food Co-op in Iowa City, Iowa Food Cooperative in Des Moines and direct to consumers.”

Grimm draws from his own experiences to help new producers get started, he said. “I also work with ISU Extension and Outreach, the ISU Beginning Farmer Center and Practical Farmers of Iowa to bring in experts to lead training for beginning farmers.”

**More to be done**

In the past five years, consumer awareness and support of local food has increased exponentially, and state and federal agencies that focused only on existing farming operations are supporting beginning farmers through loans and other programs.

“It’s much easier now to speak with a produce manager or store director about buying local products, or talk to established farmers who may have a son or daughter who wants to farm about diversifying their operations so they can have multiple generations working on one farm. The industry is growing and no one is having to force it to happen.”

One area in which Grimm hasn’t seen much change, however, is in urban agriculture in Iowa.

“We don’t have the right resources yet to help cities make appropriate policy decisions. Cedar Rapids is the only city in Iowa with an ordinance that allows urban agriculture to operate. Urban farms require a different product mix and operation than traditional rural operations; it’s farming by square foot, not by acre.”

Grimm is working to involve city and county governments and community foundations. “They can begin to play some of the leadership role in pulling together schools, hospitals, food pantries and small farms to help make connections so we can get good food to people who need it and also keep farms viable.”

Reflecting on his experience, Grimm observed, “A lot of my classmates aren’t in Iowa anymore because they didn’t see an opportunity.” To those graduates who want to stay in the state, he says, “You may need to create [opportunity] for yourself. If there’s something you’re passionate about and you want it to happen here, you need to step up and prove that it fits within this profession and this location and not be afraid to do it.”
As a joint initiative of the College of Design and ISU Extension and Outreach, the Community Design Lab works with communities across Iowa to explore concerns related to three broad categories: health and wellness; social, economic and physical infrastructure; and community revitalization. Using design as the organizing principle, the CDL collaborates with local partners to develop appropriate strategies that can be transferred and scaled for other communities.

“We use design as a research methodology to engage global challenges—disaster recovery and mitigation, economic downturn, food security, demographic changes, rural-to-urban migration—but address them from a local perspective,” said CDL co-director Nadia Anderson, assistant professor of architecture and urban design and an ISU Extension community development specialist.

Since 2012, Anderson has shared leadership of the lab with Carl Rogers, associate professor of landscape architecture. Together they have worked with communities at various scales—region, city, neighborhood, site—to identify assets and opportunities, set priorities and propose ways to accomplish both short- and long-term goals.

“It’s a reciprocal process that combines local knowledge and experience with our design research expertise to create an inclusive, innovative plan for the community’s future,” Anderson observed.

In addition to the two faculty, CDL staff members include design fellows Susan DeBieck (BS 2007 Community & Regional Planning/MS 2009 Sustainable Agriculture), Chad Hunter (MLA 2014 Landscape Architecture) and Courtney Long (BLA 2010 Landscape Architecture/MS 2012 Sustainable Agriculture) and graduate research assistants from a variety of majors.

**Participatory design**

“We engage each community through a participatory design process,” Long explained. “Working with local steering committees, we host a ‘vision’ meeting to identify three to five big ideas the community wants to focus on for the next five, 10 or 20 years.”

Using a case-study approach, CDL examines how other towns have successfully addressed similar issues to glean important principles and guidelines that then can be adapted to the goals and circumstances of the partner community.

“This is followed by a resource inventory and analysis of current conditions to develop conceptual scenarios for input by the community at public events like design charrettes,” Long said.

“We try to ensure that as many people as possible have a voice in the process,” Rogers said. “The perspectives that residents provide are incredibly valuable.”

Based on local input, the CDL continues to develop proposals and may create a phasing document that outlines next steps (hiring a design firm, for example) and potential funding opportunities.

**Maquoketa master plan**

Many of the CDL’s projects have built on relationships developed through individual studio or service-learning courses, faculty members’ research, the College of Design’s PLaCE (Partnering Learning and Community Engagement) program and ISU Extension and Outcomes programs.

As part of a pilot project for ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development’s “Communities
to Community” program, the CDL team created a master plan for Maquoketa. Based on case-study research, multiscalar analyses of design opportunities, and input from Extension, the local steering committee and a community design charrette, the CDL team developed “Think! Connect,” a conceptual plan with three scenarios: Connect Local, Connect Corridor and Connect District.

The plan illustrates connections that can be made among existing recreational, historical, business, arts and cultural amenities through streetscape enhancements, open-space revitalization and site redevelopment. It allows for comprehensive strategies to be phased incrementally with site-based projects.

Centerville identity
The Community Design Lab’s partnership with Centerville and Appanoose County began with a small-scale park-enhancement project that evolved into a broader study of public open space, regional trail development and wayfinding signage strategies.

The CDL was invited to participate by ISU Extension and Outreach’s Center for Industrial Research and Service, which had been working with the community through its Sustainable Economies Program.

The CDL team is developing recommendations for an interconnected park and trail system that capitalizes on the area’s recreational opportunities and creates a strong community identity through vehicular and pedestrian signage.

Ongoing relationships
Prior connections with the nonprofit 6th Avenue Corridor (6AC) organization in Des Moines and Matthew 25 organization in Cedar Rapids led to the CDL’s first pilot projects and ongoing work in both communities.

What began with designing a community garden on a vacant lot developed into a research method for revitalizing the historic Sixth Avenue commercial corridor that connects downtown Des Moines with the city’s northern neighborhoods, Rogers said.

Work completed by his students through classes and assistantships formed the basis of three major studies the CDL has conducted for 6AC, including a building and property assessment, an analysis of green infrastructure solutions for stormwater management, and a parking assessment.

Anderson’s interdisciplinary Bridge Studio worked with Matthew 25 to design the Cultivate Hope urban farm in Cedar Rapids’ Time Check neighborhood, which was heavily damaged by the 2008 floods. The farm achieved the first agricultural zoning amendment in the state of Iowa and has served as the catalyst for two local school gardens.

Agricultural urbanism toolkit
The organization is now a key partner in a new CDL initiative that will identify food-system resources and needs for an “agricultural urbanism toolkit.” Funded by ISU’s Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the effort will engage three pilot communities—Des Moines, Cedar Rapids and Cresco—to identify tactics and place-based strategies for local and regional revitalization of food systems.

“We’re thinking of this in terms of increasing access to and visibility of local food production and how that becomes part of a community network of open spaces, communication, transportation, social connections and business development,” Anderson said.

“The goal is to see how agricultural urbanism concepts can be transferred to different scales and types of communities,” said Long, who is coordinating the project.

“This includes not only community, school or home gardens, but also edible landscaping, farmers markets, urban farms and food hubs—the whole range of ways to achieve accessible, healthy food.”

This toolkit will be developed as a transferable model for communities locally, regionally and nationally, she said.

Replicable models
A guiding force behind all of the CDL’s projects is the use of design research to build capacity and equip community leaders, nonprofit organizations and government agencies with the tools to achieve their goals.

“The greatest impact so far may be in helping to build relationships within communities and connecting people with resources they didn’t know about,” Anderson said. “Our long-term goal is to create replicable models to serve as prototypes—not a one-size-fits-all approach, but taking advantage of common characteristics and modifying to fit local conditions.”

Ultimately, Rogers said, “the driver needs to be design. We should be creating spaces and systems that are more meaningful, more connected and more enduring for communities and citizens.”
While many College of Design projects support communities in Iowa, the college also is committed to international collaboration and outreach.

This spring, students from the College of Design and the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences (UPC) in Lima, Peru, worked with a Lima community organization to develop a micro-library for the El Carmen neighborhood in Comas, one of the capital city’s many informal suburbs.

The Iowa State students were enrolled in Interventions in the Informal Andean City, an interdisciplinary option studio taught by architecture associate professor Clare Cardinal-Pett. Known as Studio Andino, the course focuses on urban informality—unplanned, often illegal settlements on the periphery of major metropolitan areas—in the Andean region.

It’s the third year the class has collaborated with faculty and students from UPC, but the first year they’ve designed and built a real project together, Cardinal-Pett said. She received a $5,000 grant from the ISU Council on International Programs to support the expanded scope of the course, which also involved an ISU alumnus as a professional studio critic.

Micro-library project
Students in this year’s studio investigated other micro-libraries in the U.S. and around the world to determine how the concept could be adapted to conditions in El Carmen. UPC faculty member Cristina Dreifuss Serrano visited early in the semester to review initial ideas and identify those most practical for the site and partner, La Peña de los Lunes, a sports and cultural community organization.

The group holds soccer tournaments in an adjacent field and eventually plans to build a community center on the property.

With the micro-library constructed, they will be more eligible for funding for future arts, educational and cultural activities, Cardinal-Pett said.

The primary goal of the project was to provide a place where local children can access required school textbooks, which many families can’t afford, she said. Additionally, it will be a place students can go to study, read, listen to storytellers and watch children’s films.

“By proposing the micro-library, we offered an idea that they probably never would have thought of, that can help resolve the lack of access to school books and contribute to the community’s long-term goals,” Cardinal-Pett said.

Long-distance collaboration
The two groups of students communicated almost exclusively via Facebook to develop their design proposals. The community organization selected a design that used dimensional lumber for the frame, caña brava (a type of bamboo) for the wall and ceiling structure, estera (woven straw) for paneling, deck boards for flooring and wooden pallets as planters.

“It was a process of going back and forth with the students in Peru to determine what’s cost effective and what they can easily repair or replace in the future without our help,” said Amy Fay, a senior in interior design from Wallingford, Iowa, who served as the communication team leader. “We didn’t want to bring in a bunch of U.S. materials that couldn’t be obtained again.”

To help supply the micro-library, the Iowa State studio collected children’s books in both Spanish and English, along with cash.
donations for the purchase of Spanish-language elementary school textbooks.

The UPC students, who volunteered time to the project over their summer vacation, purchased materials and began construction of Micro-Biblioteca José Carlos Mariátegui, named for an early 20th-century journalist, political philosopher and activist. The ISU students traveled to Peru over their spring break to help complete construction and stock it with the more than 650 donated volumes.

“The best part of the trip was working with the UPC students in person and gaining a different view of the city and culture through them,” said Kellen Pacheco, an architecture graduate student from Pukalani, Hawaii.

Alumnus Jeffrey Morgan (BArch 1983 Architecture), director of real estate development for Historic Boston, Incorporated, in Roxbury, Mass., provided feedback on the design through Facebook and FaceTime conversations and joined the students in Lima.

“My own interests in my practice have shifted over the past 10-15 years, more recently into multicultural design and influences in urban redevelopment strategies. Because my research addresses some of the same topics students were tackling in the studio, Clare felt I could be helpful,” Morgan said. “I always enjoy engaging with students, and it was an opportunity to extend my own education as well.”

**Engagement informs designs**

In addition to the micro-library, the ISU students developed independent projects addressing issues of urban informality in Lima and in Bogotá, Colombia. Members of a Bogotá design NGO, Fundación Juliguión, served as consultants to help students compare informal developments in Lima with spontaneous settlements in Bogotá.

They and Morgan traveled to Iowa State in April to participate in the Latin American Urbanism Symposium and serve as guest critics for the final studio projects.

“We did this real project first, which familiarized students with a whole host of issues they wouldn’t be aware of,” Cardinal-Pett said. “Engagement with the community helped them realize what the local conditions are and better informed their theoretical designs.”

For his project, Michael Buh examined water scarcity in Lima’s arid climate.

“Water quality and access changes as you move out of the city center to the newer, less formal settlements higher up on the mountain, farther from central markets where residents can purchase water,” said Buh, a fifth-year landscape architecture student from Marion, Iowa.

He researched fog-net technology and proposed a system of polypropylene fog nets to capture condensation at an optimal elevation and store it in below-ground cisterns to provide easier, cheaper access to potable water.

**Cultural considerations**

Pacheco and Navaz Ebbrahim, an architecture graduate student from Tehran, Iran, developed a community kitchen concept for a very narrow open lot in a densely populated neighborhood of Lima’s Comas settlement.

“We wanted to use inexpensive local materials—mostly concrete and brick—but do something innovative to stand out from other buildings in the area,” Ebbrahim said. Inspired by Peruvian textile designs, she devised a way to lay the brick in an unconventional pattern to create openings for light and ventilation as well as add character to the façade.

Projects by interior design seniors in the class included a community kitchen, market and garden for a neighborhood on the southern edge of Bogotá, and a bicycle network concept for Lima with bicycle rental stations and restrooms independent of city water and sewer systems.

“I really appreciated that all of the projects in some way addressed cultural considerations in design, as well as had a social component related to the identity of the community for which they were designing,” Morgan said.

“This studio managed to tie the design education we’ve had up to now into the real world,” Buh said. “We’ve gone a lot further into exploring the implications and impacts that a project can carry with it.”
“Within a community, it is often the artists who call upon others to dream. With those dreams comes the possibility of real change.”

In “The Artists Next Door”—a series of workshops offered at Iowa State University Design West in Sioux City, Iowa—artist and College of Design faculty member Jennifer Drinkwater invited local high school students to dream and discover what it means to be an active “artist citizen” in their community.

For five Saturdays from February through April, students from East, North and Bishop Heelan high schools examined the history and current climate of Sioux City as inspiration to create public-minded art projects, said Drinkwater, a senior lecturer in integrated studio arts.

“The students were really engaged and enthusiastic,” she said. “They were eager to explore the role of the artist in the community and how art can be used to shape their neighborhoods.”

**Freedom to play**

Integrated visual arts graduate assistant Rahele Jomepour, Mashhad, Iran, and alumnus Arty Vongphakdy (BFA 2012 Integrated Studio Arts), Sioux City, assisted Drinkwater with the program. Through the workshops, participants investigated their assumptions, memories and knowledge of Sioux City to develop drawings, models and visual art maps. The projects focused both on what Sioux City already offers and on ways to expand and enhance art experiences in the community.

“We tried to make it feel like a lab rather than a class and provide the freedom to experiment, take risks and play,” Drinkwater said.

In an early project, the group divided into two teams, and each team developed a public art intervention for a site in Sioux City. They then did drawings and built small models of their ideas.

One team designed an interactive “maze” for downtown, while the other team designed two public sculptures that would stand in the Missouri River near the bridge connecting South Sioux City, Neb., with Sioux City.

“The sculptures were figurative and suggested unity and connection between ethnically diverse areas,” Drinkwater said.

Claire Schaefer’s favorite project involved creating a narrative map of Sioux City, she said.

“I have lived here nearly my entire life, and it was very rewarding to discover the city in this new sense,” said Schaefer, a sophomore at Bishop Heelan High School. “We all worked on the project together, and I thought it conveyed the feeling of the city in a very unique way.”

East High School sophomore Shayna Skokan enjoyed experimenting with different techniques, she said, and working with other student artists.

“We were free to express our individual ideas with unlimited supplies,” she said. “We were also challenged to collaborate and combine our creative ideas into one final project.”

**Community transformation**

At the end of April, students shared the work they had created all semester in an exhibition and public reception at ISU Design West.

“A common thread the students identified was that the places they
liked best were outside, but for the size of their community, there aren’t a lot of parks or outdoor gathering spaces,” Drinkwater said. “So for the final installation, called ‘Transformation,’ we created a park at Design West using reclaimed materials—carpet rocks, construction paper trees, a cardboard swing.”

Interactive components of the exhibition included an 1891 official Sioux City map projected on a piece of paper on the wall to allow visitors to explore how the city has changed and add their own drawings or memories based on personal experiences within the community. People also could choose from a collection of historical images to create origami flowers and birds—another nod to the need students found for “more nature in the urban environment.”

**Future potential**

Drinkwater plans to continue the Artists Next Door program in the fall. Based on feedback from participants and parents, there likely will be one continuous project, students will meet for shorter periods of time and they can attend all workshops or whatever dates their schedules allow.

In future semesters, Drinkwater also hopes to have students complete a permanent or semi-permanent piece of public art for a specific local site, “something they can visit that they contributed to and that creates a long-term focus on art in the community.”

She would like to replicate the program in other communities, beginning in places like Perry that already have Iowa State facilities, she said. She also sees great potential for creating a summer artist residency program for graduate students, who could spend several weeks in small Iowa towns as working artists/designers and community liaisons.

“We could pair students with different expertise, like a planner with a visual artist, and provide them with a meaningful outreach experience while engaging more communities,” Drinkwater said.
In 2012, Iowa State University became a founding member of the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru). College of Design Dean Luis Rico-Gutierrez was instrumental in forming this partnership, which now involves more than 30 public and private institutions committed to transforming research universities to ensure the greatest possible support for interdisciplinary research, curricula, programs and creative practice among the arts, sciences and other disciplines.

This fall, Iowa State will host “Edge Effects,” the 2014 a2ru National Conference, Nov. 5-8 at the Scheman Building and other locations on campus.

The “edge effect” refers to the changes in population and diversity of species where habitats meet, compete and overlap. In those boundary spaces, or edges, ecologists often find greater numbers of species from both habitats as well as greater biodiversity than found in either.

Similarly, at the edges where different disciplines meet, scholars and creators form unique relationships, make adaptations and often develop new fields, knowledge and modes of creative expression.

The November conference will include about 40 presentations, including panels, breakout sessions, performances and roundtable discussions on topics related to cross-disciplinary creativity, collaboration, communication, technology, research and innovation. It will also offer tours and other special events for participants.

Find out more at a2ru.org/events/2014-a2ru-national-conference-iowa-state-university and register online at goo.gl/ZmTcXa. We look forward to seeing you!