

ABSTRACT: Educacion Universitaria y Contribucion a la Comunidad.  
Un ejemplo desde Texas, Estados Unidos

Cecilia Giusti, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean, College of Architecture, Texas A&M University

The proposed paper and presentation will focus is on ways to connect architecture and urban planning students and faculty with communities. Several examples will be discussed as students and faculty, through curriculum and no-curriculum activities engage in society's needs. The College of Architecture (COA) at Texas A&M University is one of the largest colleges of its kind in the United States with more than 2,000 students, about 120 faculty members and 40 staff members. It offers graduate and undergraduate programs in the design, planning, construction, land development, and visualization professions. Specifically, the COA administers five undergraduate and nine graduate degree programs - each fully accredited at the highest possible level - through the departments of 1) Architecture, 2) Construction Science, 3) Landscape Architecture & Urban Planning, and 4) Visualization. Offerings include four professional design and planning degrees, as well as doctorate programs in 1) architecture and 2) urban and regional planning.

For the last three years I have been working as the COA Associate Dean for Outreach and Diversity; in such a role the COA aims at better connecting the campus with the community at large; this means not only the surrounding geographical area but also out of our immediate reach. A strong commitment goes to groups in society that are more vulnerable and have fewer resources to respond to unexpected environments like environmental hazards or specific needs. Though quite diverse, the disciplines within the college have one predominant commonality - the search for bettering the built environment. Because the creativity and sensitivity with which each discipline is practiced has a profound influence on the quality of life in society, the college challenges students and faculty to weave aesthetics, safety, function, financial feasibility, sustainability and environmental stewardship into the creative process.

The presentataion will focus on few of the current engagement in our communities: 1) A Dialogo on the Border incorporated discussion on the issues affecting communities where Latinos are emerging as a majority and have been excluded from the planning process. This student-led effort was awarded the Texas Chapter APA (American Planning Association) 2015 award for its creativity in engaging traditionally marginalized populations. Faculty and students from architecture, planning, constructions, civil engineering, and public health were engaged in this effort. 2) A second effort engaged a much relegated population: the African American community Bryan, where Texas A&M is located. After conversations with them we learned about the Brazos Valley African American Museum, a community resource that needed support. Specifically students proposed enhancements on the landscape of the museum bringing innovative ideas and participatory proposals. Further, the museum wanted to re-create some schools that served the African American population which, during the de-segregation process happened to burned. While there is no clear explanation for the fires, students were "enforced" to integrate. Studio class interviewed older population who attended these schools as there are no photos or written material; in doing so, planning students joined efforts making this a multi-disciplinary study. The process, including the interview with former students, was filmed, resulting on short/long video. In this this community outreach project incorporated students from landscape architecture, architecture, planning and visualization.

These efforts not only impact our community. They also impact, in the most positive way, our students. While they learn the actual engagement with "clients" they also realize the direct application of their more theoretical course and see, first hands, the many needs of our most vulnerable populations.