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Meeting the Needs of Refugees in Utah Through Interior Design

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**MEETING THE NEEDS OF REFUGEES IN UTAH THROUGH
INTERIOR DESIGN**

by

Valerie Diane Jenkins

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

**in Interior Design
in the Department of Art and Design**

Approved:

Thesis/Project Advisor
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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT

Spring 2014

Meeting the needs of Refugees in Utah Through Interior Design

Valerie Jenkins Honors Thesis

Abstract:

This thesis will discuss a collaborative project between the senior students in the Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning (LAEP) department and the Interior Design (ID) Program. In an effort to understand and address the needs of the refugees who reside in South Salt Lake we will research, go on site visits, speak with refugee families, and meet with the outreach coordinator for the refugee community of South Salt Lake. All needs, whether observed or mentioned specifically, will be taken into account and addressed within the parameters of the project.

LAEP students will create an urban plan for the redevelopment of nine blocks from 300 West to South Main Street and 2100 South to West Truman Ave in South Salt Lake. ID students will design buildings and interiors to meet the needs of refugees and support community infrastructure.

The goal of this project is to encourage community building through developing the infrastructure in this area. The parameters for this project involve the redesign of a nine block area and to design the three spaces specified by the outreach coordinator and specialist for the refugee community in South Salt Lake. The spaces include an apartment complex, marketplace, and transit center.

Research and groundwork:

In teams, interior design students researched current initiatives to build and strengthen the South Salt Lake community. Refugee statistics, goals for the community in 2040, transportation, development plans, and example community centers were areas researched. Additional research included site visits to the Bud Bailey Project and the South Parc complex to learn about the refugees' housing challenges. An interview with Rachel Sanderson, the outreach coordinator and specialist for refugees in South Salt Lake was also conducted.

The International Refugee Committee (IRC) is an organization that responds to the needs of people fleeing from their homes due to war and conflict. The organization has headquarters in 40 countries and in 22 cities in the United States (IRC, 2014). One of the headquarters is in Salt Lake City, Utah. As a result, Salt Lake County often houses refugees. South Salt Lake is a typical home for new refugees to be placed when they first come to America (Sanderson, 2013). The refugee population in Utah is comprised of 59 ethnicities and nationalities, and they speak more than 50 different languages (Roger Altizer, 2013). Some refugees are only in South Salt Lake for a few years, but others are there to make a permanent life in a new home. There are many challenges that face refugees as they come to America, such as few speak the language, and many have little or no money and few possessions (Sanderson, 2013). The Migration Policy Institute shows an increase in the number of refugees and immigrants to Utah over the past few years. Data shows that the number of foreign births in Utah increased from 58,600 in 1990 to 240,872 births in 2012 (Migration Policy Institute, 2014). Additional data shows that the number of refugees and immigrants jumped from 57,164 in 1990 to 240,872 in 2012. These numbers show the significant increase of a foreign population in Utah.

Initial research included several site visits. The ID senior class went to South Salt Lake to appraise the nine block area that had been assigned for conceptual redevelopment. The first step in the process was to assign groups of three or four students to certain blocks within the designated area and record the number of businesses and types, as well as any housing that was found. Through this process the interior design students and faculty were able to ascertain the general makeup of the nine blocks. This made it easier to know what changes would need to be made in order to create a community that would better serve the purpose of integrating refugees. The interior design students also documented the business types and infrastructure in the area surrounding the designated blocks, to understand the general make-up of the community.

Interior design students and faculty met at the Bud Bailey Project (Figure 1), which is an apartment complex with an adjoining community center that has a focus on helping to house refugees. As we toured the facility, the students and faculty learned what was already being done to meet the needs of the refugees. The community center was well developed and had an exercise room, computer stations, and a counseling office. The complex was designed to provide clean and well lit spaces with good sight lines in stark contrast to the refugee camp environment in which refugees might have lived previously that felt dangerous and unsafe.

The South Parc apartments (Figure 2) provide housing to refugees of many nationalities including Bhutanese, Thai, Burmese, Somalian, Karen, and Iran. The Hser Ner Moo community and welcome center, is located within the South Parc complex and is named for a seven year-old Karen girl who was murdered in the apartment complex (Reavy, 2014). Her death brought the community in South Parc closer together as the residents suffered her loss. After-school programs for children were instituted as a result of Hser Ner Moo's death to provide a safe place for the children to be while their parents were working. The community and welcome center was later named after her and dedicated to her memory.



Figure 1. Bud Bailey Apartments.



Figure 2. South Parc Apartments.

Rachel Sanderson, the outreach coordinator and specialist for the refugee community of South Salt Lake, organized us into groups of four or five and took us into the homes to speak with the refugees. My group visited with a Burmese man who had been living in the United States with his family for over five years. When asked about any changes he wanted to see in his home or the complex, he mentioned that the apartment basement was unfinished and would flood in the winter. Due to this issue, they never used the basement which reduced the livable area by a third.

He had no other suggestions, requiring us to make an observation of his needs. A few of these were:

- He had bright posters of vivid green, yellow, orange and red hues covering the beige walls. This expressed his need to have the colors of his native country in his home.
- His family didn't have much furniture and most possessions were piled on the floor. Creating built in furniture would reduce what the refugees would have to buy on their own.
- In front of each apartment there is a 2'x4' grass plot, and theirs, like many others, was filled with as many vegetables as could be planted. This shows that they need land to garden because they are accustomed to growing their own food.
- Children were playing in the parking lot because it was very large and was the only play area available. A safe play area for youth is strongly needed.

After the interview we met in the community center with the other student groups and faculty to talk about what had been learned from our group visits. The refugees visited originated from Bhutan, Thailand, Somalia, and Burma. Many of the issues noted were the same such as, the apartments did not fulfill the needs of their occupants due to small size, the lack of sufficient gardening areas, and no safe place for children to be outside.

Rachel Sanderson talked about needs she saw for the refugee community. These were:

- A home in which the refugees can feel proud living.
- To be able to use their talents to and find a way to generate income for their families.
- Easier access to a grocery store, preferably one that carries some of their native foods.
- Better access the surrounding area, to increase access to goods, services, jobs, etc., because many of them don't have cars (Sanderson, 2013).

Contrasting the Bud Bailey Project to the South Parc complex shows the consideration the Bud Bailey Project has placed on creating a space for refugees to feel at home. Two improvements I noted that would improve the Bud Bailey Project to be more accommodating to refugees would be to reduce echoing in the hallways and to include an area for children to play soccer outdoors. After speaking with the outreach specialist about the refugee children's desire to play soccer, it was evident that the playground at the Bud Bailey Project would not be sufficient for the children's need to play sport games.

Collaborative Design

In the Fall of 2013 the interior design seniors were informed by Susan Tibbitts, one of the project administrators, that they would be collaborating with the senior LAEP students on a redevelopment project for the city of South Salt Lake. The LAEP students would be creating an urban plan for the area and the ID students would be working within the selected urban plan to create their designs. During a meeting with LAEP and ID students and faculty, all of the conceptual plans would be presented. The teams of LAEP students would present their urban redevelopment plans, and the ID teams would present their proposed apartment complexes. After the presentations a vote for the final urban plan and apartment complex would be made by the students of both groups and the faculty.

The teams of ID students began designing an apartment complex for the refugees. Research showed that deep social divisions can be overcome by integrating ethnicities, incomes and backgrounds to create a mixed community (Bates, Lane, Power, & Serle, 2013). Each of the teams proposed and presented a mixed community apartment design to their peers and the senior landscape architecture students. After voting, the apartment complex called “the Summit” was selected. The Summit building plan included floor plans showing where apartments, hallways, and stairs were for each of the five levels. There were also exterior elevations and renderings for the building (Figure 3).

The Summit building solved many of the observed needs of the refugees. The rooftop provides access to a greenhouse for the residents and provides them with a place to garden and grow food to support their families. Incorporated into the building are a number of gathering places and room for a community center to help foster community connectivity. The apartment sizes vary to suit the needs of different families and each apartment provides a unique place for each resident to enjoy.



Figure 3. Summit renderings created by Trevor Call of Moriyama Studio.

The Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning (LAEP) student teams created conceptual urban redevelopment plans for the area which they presented to the interior design students. Two or three of the interior design students were then paired with each LAEP group to help inform each urban plan. From that point the proposed urban plans were refined and a vote of the LAEP students and ID students and faculty decided which urban plan would be chosen as the final selection (Figure 4). The interior design students drew all of the buildings for the conceptual urban plan in AutoCad and had them laser cut from wood. Together the landscape architecture students and the interior design seniors assembled the scale model of the urban plan which was to be presented to the city council member of South Salt Lake(Figures 5, 6, and 7).



Figure 4. Selected urban plan for the nine block area.



Figure 5. Trees for the model being prepared.

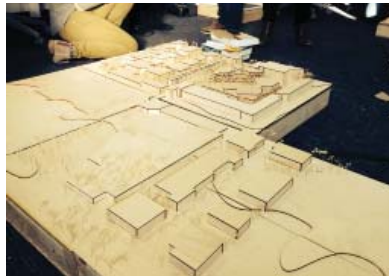


Figure 6. Process of the model being built.



Figure 7. LAEP and interior design students assembling the model.

Proposed Individual Designs

Interior design students created designs for the spaces that were suggested by the refugee outreach coordinator. In addition to the three spaces she mentioned, a housing complex, marketplace and transit center, the students designed a space of their choice. This additional space was chosen based on student research findings and what they felt would strengthen the infrastructure of the community.

Each interior design student chose one apartment in the Summit complex to space plan and render for two clients. One space would show how a refugee might live, and the other would depict how an American might live in the space. The results were two very different design options.

Proposed Kitchen for Burmese Client

Rachel Sanderson mentioned in her interview that the kitchen is an important communal setting in the home, and that the kitchen, dining, and living room should be open to one another to accommodate the refugees' cultural need for togetherness. Bigger kitchens were needed because cooking is usually a collaborative effort.

My client was a Burmese family with four children that have been living in the United States for only a few months. The design goals for their space included:

- The use of color as a connection to their native country.
- Creating a space that felt inviting and comfortable.
- Reducing the need to purchase furniture.

I had observed that the Burmese home I visited had posters with bright colors with warm undertones covering the beige walls. To address the observed need for color I used light and medium browns in the flooring and cabinetry in conjunction with green painted walls and an orange rug (Figure 8). A feeling of comfort comes through the warmth in the undertones as well as in the use of cultural colors.

The building floorplan and apartment layout show the location of the space within the building (Figures 9 and 10). I designed pieces of furniture that were multi-functional, such as the kitchen island doubling as a dining table to provide options for use in the space. Having multiple uses for one item reduced the pieces of furniture that the refugees might need to purchase.



Figure 8. Interior rendering by Valerie Jenkins.

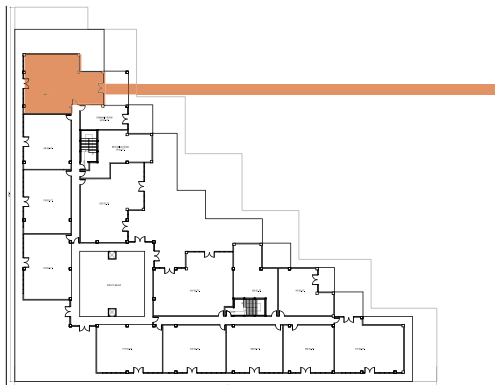


Figure 9. Building floorplan by Lauren Henrie, Jessica Nguyen, Sydney Greer, and Katelyn Lindstrom.

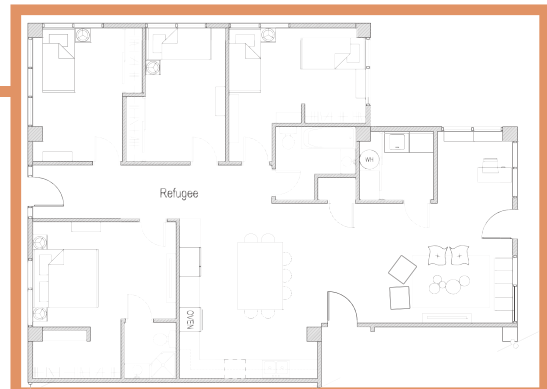


Figure 10. Apartment floorplan and furniture layout by Valerie Jenkins.

Proposed Kitchen for American Client

This client was a family originally from Maine, which moved to Utah for health reasons. The family consists of a father and mother and three children. Their desires for their home included:

- A modern yet timeless look.
- Light and airy attributes.
- An open floor plan.

This kitchen implements a subtle use of color and has a distinct use of texture that creates a modern feel (Figure 11). Most of the surfaces are very smooth, as is evident in the counters and high-gloss tiled wall. This is contrasted with the linear texture of the wood cabinets and the rough texture of the concrete flooring. The kitchen, dining, and living area compose one large room, which meets the desire for an open floor plan. Light is brought into the space through a glass door at the front of the apartment and large windows on the far side of the living room.

The building floorplan and the apartment floorplan show the apartment layout and where this apartment is located in the complex (Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 11. Rendering by Valerie Jenkins.

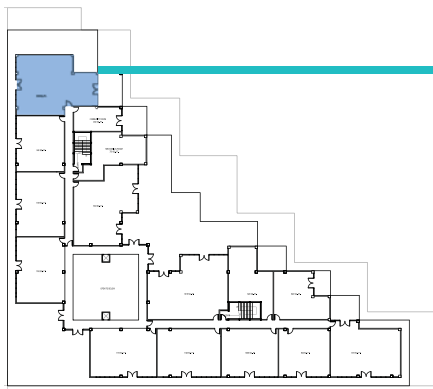


Figure 12. Building floorplan by Lauren Henrie, Jessica Nguyen, Sydney Greer, and Katelyn Lindstrom.

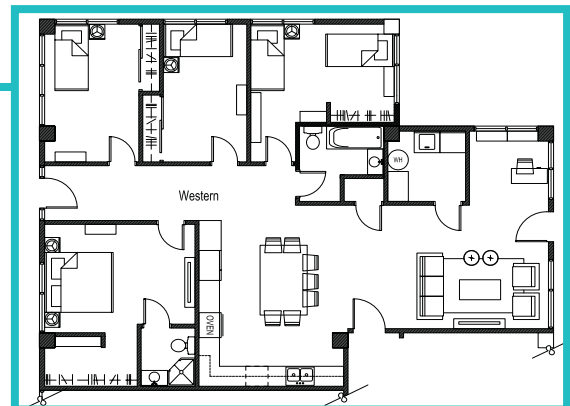


Figure 13. Apartment floorplan and furniture layout by Valerie Jenkins.

Outdoor Community Area

Rachel Sanderson, the outreach coordinator for the refugee population of South Salt Lake, made the following comment:

“The little kids need a place where they can ride their bikes, it isn’t safe to ride out here in the street. They just need a little area where they can ride. Their houses are small, they need to be outside so they need a play area somewhat enclosed so the parents can know they are safe while they continue, because around here, 18 months old is old enough to tend yourself. So, please, design a safe play area.”

To address this need I designed an outdoor community space (Figure 14 and 15) where the adults and children are in close proximity to each other. While the children are playing the adults can be socializing. The children’s outdoor space (Figure 16) provides a chalk wall, an imagination playground, and an area to ride bikes.

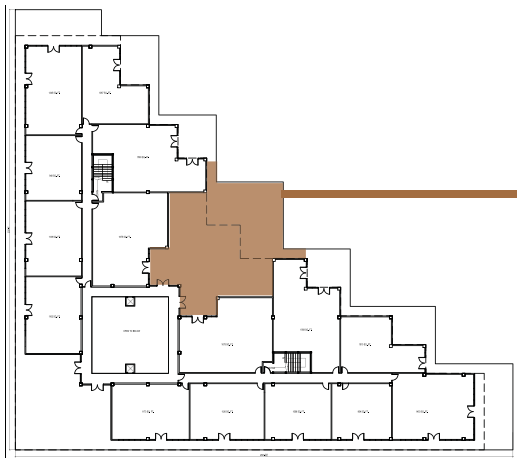


Figure 14. Building floorplan by Lauren Henrie, Jessica Nguyen, Sydney Greer, and Katelyn Lindstrom.

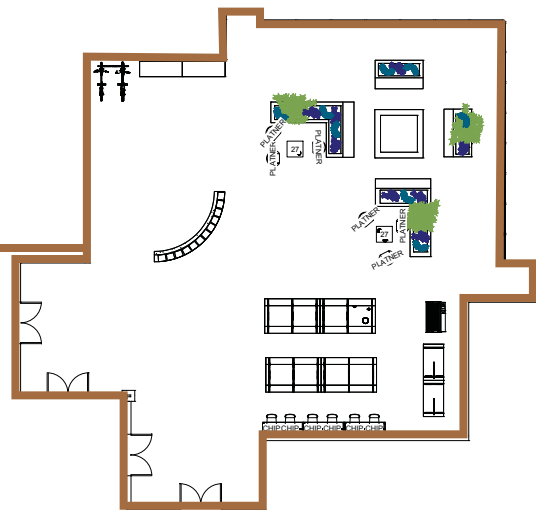


Figure 15. Floorplan and layout by Valerie Jenkins.



Figure 16. Community space rendering, by Valerie Jenkins.

Incubator Space

This marketplace design shown has an unusual element called an “incubator” space (Figure 17). An incubator is a small business, usually consisting of one person. The individual businesses receive help and guidance from professionals as they learn how to manage their business. The more knowledge they gain the more independent they can become (Incubator, 2014). The goal of an incubator is to provide the business owner with enough knowledge and revenue to become more established.

This marketplace is proposed in this area to help build the community through the business growth of the incubator spaces (Figure 18). The incubator spaces are not reserved for refugees, but can be utilized by any member of the community seeking to learn how to build or start their own business. The building floorplan depicts the areas specified for incubator spaces and the other places designated for retail areas (Figure 19). By promoting individual and business growth in this marketplace, the community can be stimulated.



Figure 17. Marketplace rendering by Valerie Jenkins.



Figure 18. Exterior rendering of Marketplace by Valerie Jenkins.

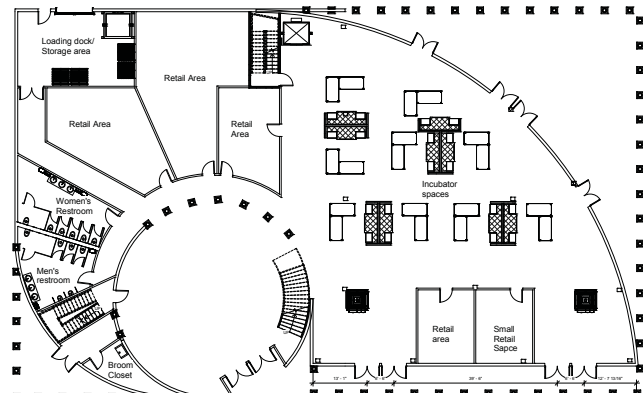


Figure 19. Building design, floorplan, and furniture layout by Valerie Jenkins.

Transit Center

The Sugar House Streetcar opened on December 8, 2013 and meets the UTA Trax as it runs East to West from Sugar House to South Salt Lake. The S-line needs a transit center to make the area where the two forms of transportation meet available to the community. I chose an existing building on West Cross Rd. Square to conceptually redesign to be used as the transit center (Figure 20).

This transit center is within walking distance of the proposed location for the Summit apartment complex. This provides easy access to the individuals living in the apartment building. The space could benefit the refugee population because it would broaden the area that they can travel without a car. This would allow them better access to jobs and grocery stores. There are also retail units located in the interior of the transit center that could provide additional job opportunities (Figure 21).



Figure 20. Exterior rendering by Valerie Jenkins.



Figure 21. Interior rendering by Valerie Jenkins.

Universal Spiritual Center

My last focus for the project was on the emotional well-being of the refugees. The number of refugees within South Salt Lake and their origin fluctuate regularly. Due to this fluctuation, I decided to design a universal space in which to worship (Figures 22 and 23).

In order to most effectively serve the largest number of people, this worship center needed to be highly versatile and non-representational of any particular religion. This led me to create a space that could be easily divided or enlarged through the use of curtain walls. The entire space can be opened up into a large room or can be subdivided into a series of smaller rooms to accommodate multiple gatherings at the same time. Another unifying factor in the building is the use of nature as a universal connection between all people and all religions (Figure 24). This is seen through the exterior landscape as well as the atrium in the center of the structure. The atrium houses trees, potted bamboo, and sitting areas for people to sit and ponder.



Figure 22. Interior rendering by Valerie Jenkins.



Figure 23. Reception area rendering and building design Valerie Jenkins.

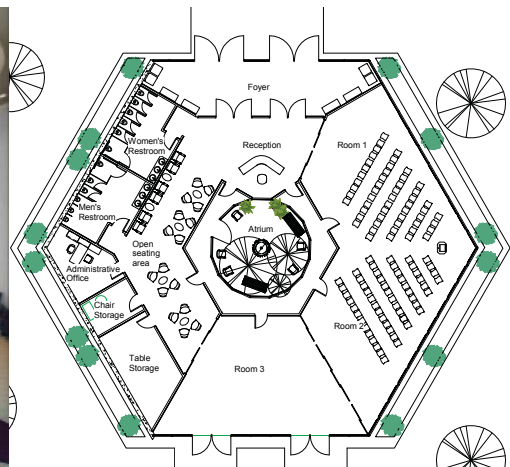


Figure 24. Floorplan by Valerie Jenkins.

Conclusion

Through this project I learned about the refugee population that resides in South Salt Lake and about the needs that they have. The needs addressed were largely observed needs, whether they were of our own observations or observed by the outreach coordinator, Rachel Sanderson. I was able to provide proposed solutions in the four interior design projects I completed. I feel I met my goals in the following ways:

- The apartment complex includes apartments ranging in size to accommodate individual needs. There is a rooftop garden solely for the use of the people who live in the complex. There are community gathering spaces throughout the building that promote community connectivity. This also allows for the adults to gather while still in close range with their children. Examples of apartment spaces that I created show built-in furniture the refugees would have otherwise needed to purchase.
- The transit center is within walking distance of the apartment complex and expands the accessible area for the refugees. As a transportation depot, it can provide access to jobs and grocery stores that would have otherwise been out of reach for those individuals without cars.
- The need for an opportunity to generate income and use the skills and talents that they already possess was addressed by creating a marketplace that had an emphasis on incubator shops. These small shops would be mentored so the individuals growing the business would learn valuable business skills and generate revenue as they worked.
- A spiritual center that is denominationally neutral was created to fulfill an emotional need, thereby providing a place where any religion could meet and use the facility. The hexagonal shape of the building allows for easy division of the space using curtain walls. In this way, the building can accommodate a large congregation or a few small gatherings, depending on the needs of the users.

Learning about the plight of the refugee population through research, site visits, and personally speaking with the refugees has changed my views on design. This project has taught me that through collaboration and design, not only can individuals be affected, but whole communities can be stimulated and the infrastructure supported. In this project I focused on meeting the needs of the refugees and each space designed could benefit any member of the community. The versatility of the designs and the stimulation they could potentially bring to the community are aspects that make this project achieve the goal of building a stronger community for South Salt Lake.

The potential for the proposed designs to be incorporated in the redevelopment of South Salt Lake is high. The LAEP students were able to present their urban plan to the redevelopment committee for South Salt Lake and received positive feedback. My hope is that these designs and ideas will be a catalyst for change and positive growth in South Salt Lake and provide information and options for the refugee community.

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Time Log

Date	Hours	What was worked on/ accomplished
8.29.2013	2	Research: Refugee statistics
9.2.2013	1	Listening to: Design like you give a damn
9.3.2013	5.5	South Salt Lake research, documenting buildings, residences, refugee housing (3 hours of research, 2.5 of driving/commuting)
9.5.2013	2	Making Cad file of city block 3, ted talks research and refugee statistics
9.9.2013	1	Creating a way to present research (summary and finding images)
09.12.2013	3	Making a group, inspiration and research
09.14.2013	2	Research/inspiration and concept
09.16.2013	2.5	Conceptual space planning
09.17.2013	3	Group sketching and concept
09.19.2013	3	CAD work and printing floors
09.23.2013	1	Space planning
09.24.2013	2	Group meeting, planning, designing
09.26.2013	3	Scaling building, determining square footage, adding columns
09.30.2013	1	Space planning level 2
10.01.2013	4	Space planning level 2, deciding as a group the layout, developing stairs
10.02.2013	1.5	Drawing elevations for the third floor
10.03.2013	4	Making the model, printing elevations, assembling conceptual packet
10.08.2013	4	Field trip to Bud Bailey and Sher Ner Moo
10.09.2013	2	Making powerpoint for presentation
10.10.2013	3	Presenting to interior design students/Pitching ideas
10.12.2013	1	Floor plan adjustments
10.16.2013	2	Creating final presentation, fixing floorplans and elevations
10.18.2013	1.5	Presenting to LAEP students and professor
10.21.2013	1	Watching LAEP students urban planning presentations
10.24.2013	2.5	Outline for space planning, designing and rendering interiors and one exterior.
10.28.2013	2	Space planning 900 square foot space
10.29.2013	8	Space planning 1300 sq ft space, planning community area, critiques
11.1.2013	1	Revising space plans
11.2.2013	1	Revising space plans
11.4.2013	5	Selecting materials and modeling in Revit
11.5.2013	7	Modeling in revit, selecting finishes
11.6.2013	5	Applying materials, adding light fixtures,
11.7.2013	3	Selecting camera view, and rendering angle
11.8.2013	2	Draft rendering, adding accessories
11.9.2013	2.5	Sketching, hand rendering, working on refugee unit
11.11.2013	7	Setting up renderings and photoshopping
11.12.2013	7	Changing materials and door in wester, then rerendering
11.13.2013	3	Photoshopping, materials for refugee area
11.14.2013	3	Rendering critique/ Adding changes to renderings

Time Log (cont.)

11.14.2013	3	Rendering critique/ Adding changes to renderings
11.18.2013	5	Photoshopping refugee space
11.19.2013	4	more photoshopping
11.20.2013	3	Space planning community space and selecting camera view
11.21.2013	3	Community space rendering critique
11.24.2013	2	Space planning community space and changing camera
11.25.2013	3	Adding accessories to community space
Winter Break		
1.9.2014	3	Beginning to assemble the physical model
1.14.2014	3	Assembling the buildings for the model
1.16.2014	3	Assembling the model with the LAEP students.
1.20.2014	3	Code analysis and space planning
1.21.2014	2	Designing marketplace exterior
1.22.2014	4	Continued design on exterior
1.23.2014	3	Space planning interior
1.25.2014	4	Creating second exterior option (result of a critique)
1.28.2014	5	Professional critique and making changes to floorplan
1.29.2014	3.5	Redoing marketplace floor plan
1.30.2014	1.4	Fixing floorplans and elevations
2.1.2014	4	deciding on rendering view and adding lighting fixtures
2.3.2014	2	Applying materials
2.4.2014	2.5	Changing materials and furniture selection
2.5.2014	2	Photoshopping
2.6.2014	3	Photoshopping rendering
2.10.2014	4	Working on rendering (adjusting lighting and adding entourage)
2.11.2014	4	Conceptual ideas/ presenting for the transit center
2.12.2014	4	Finishing rendering (adding people, adjusting levels of contrast)
2.13.2014	2	Work on the model/more photoshopping
2.15.2014	3	Selecting and existing building for transit center/ beginning floorplan
2.17.2014	5	Creating a floor plan for the transit center
2.18.2014	3	Space planning interior of transit center
2.19.2014	1	Adding exterior scape to transit center
2.20.2014	1	Adjusting exterior scape
2.21.2014	2	Making bathrooms and offices
2.22.2014	3	Arranging furniture and creating space for an on-site police
2.24.2014	3	Material selection and various changes
2.25.2014	4	Space planning units
2.26.2013	2	adding lighting
2.28.2014	5	More space planning of interior units and material selection
3.3.2014	1	First attempt at exterior rendering

Time Log (cont.)

3.4.2014	3	Preliminary photoshopping of exterior rendering
3.5.2014	2	Photoshopping exterior rendering
3.6.2014	1	Critique and photoshopping
3.10.2014	6	Creating interior rendering and photoshopping it
3.11.2014	4.5	Photoshopping both renderings and material changes
3.12.2014	4	Critique on facebook/ making changes and writing a description of the space
3.13.2014	2	Creating a board with both images, materials, and description
3.17.2014	2	Finding inspiration for the third project (spiritual center)
3.20.2014	3	Spiritual center floor plan
3.21.2014	1	Adjusting floorplan/ designing choir area
3.24.2014	2	Space planning pews and classrooms
3.25.2014	3	Crit on the spiritual center
3.26.2014	2	Starting over on inspiration and floorplan
3.27.2014	4	Talking with Steve about ideas, beginning an hexagon floorplan.
3.28.2014	5	Designing the building for the Spiritual center and floor plan
3.29.2014	3	changing exterior materials and design.
3.31.2014	2	Finding material selections for the spiritual center.
4.1.2014	5	Professional critique, designing flooring and carpet
4.2.2014	3	preliminary rendering of chapel and reception area.
4.3.2014	3	more renderings, changing surface materials
4.4.2014	3	Additional floorplan changes, making curtain walls.
4.7.2014	6	Final renderings of reception and chapel
4.8.2014	5	Rendering and photoshop

Total Hours	305
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