

Learning from California: Highlights of CRP Studios Fall 2012/Spring 2013

Hemalata Dandekar

PhD.; professor and department head, CRP.

CRP Department Head Hemalata Dandekar writes about the 2012-13 studio projects. By highlighting their objectives and accomplishments, she notes how important community outreach and learn-by-doing studio pedagogy are in shaping students into professionals who will be fully engaged in the field.

Extensive hands-on work in the studio continues to be a distinct signifier of CRP's undergraduate and graduate programs. Work completed in classes during the 2012-13 academic year served a diverse group of California communities as well as a small coastal settlement in Vietnam. Host communities ranged from Clearlake in Northern California, to Menlo Park in the Bay Area, and south of San Luis Obispo to Goleta and the city of Bell in Metropolitan Los Angeles.

The quality of CRP students at all levels of training work makes it an attractive proposition for cities to contract with us. Our studios engage students to look ahead at ways to improve the fabric of cities at different scales, from project site to citywide and regional. The exposure to real communities and diverse locals gives CRP students a broad exposure to planning issues throughout the state. Their success in meeting the needs of diverse client-communities is an indication that our students are well prepared to undertake the increasingly complex prob-

lems that professional planners must address. In the 2012-13 academic year, CRP studios engaged in the following projects:

San Luis Obispo, CA

Undergraduate Studios: CRP 201 (Fall 2012), CRP 202 (Winter 2012), and CRP 203 (Spring 2013)

Our home city of San Luis Obispo was the host of all three of our undergraduate studios, each addressing urban design/planning problems of increasing scale at various sites and corridors. Under the guidance of instructors Umut Toke and Woody Combrink, undergraduates in CRP 201 learned the basic graphic presentation skills in urban design using pencil, pen, ink, color, and rendering to plan/design options for a key gateway into San Luis Obispo at Marsh and Higuera streets, a site now occupied by a gas station (Figure 2).

Professors Vicente del Rio and Umut Toker, in their respective sections of CRP 202, completed a mixed-use development plan for a site at the gateway to the city from the north where Highway 1 meets Foothill Boulevard (Figure 3). Currently occupied by an outmoded shopping center, the site is critical to the city and to the Cal Poly community, surrounded as it is by

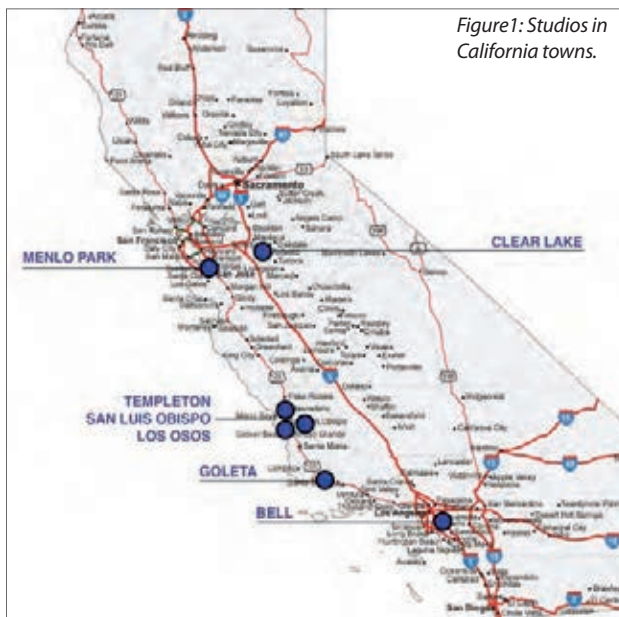


Figure 1: Studios in California towns.

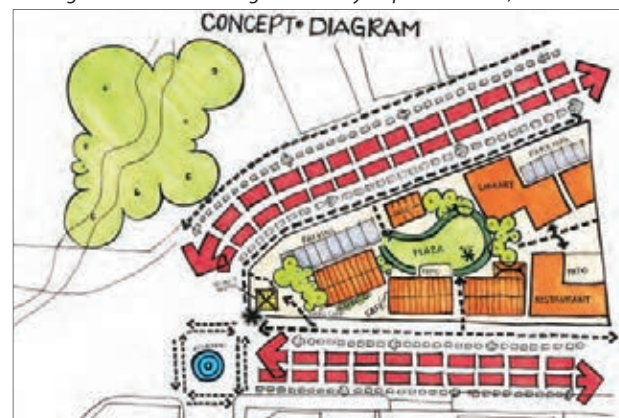


Figure 2: Part of the design exercise by Stephanie Benzel, CRP 201.

off-campus student housing and only a couple of blocks away from campus. The student teams came up with feasible pedestrian-friendly mixed-use residential/commercial development solutions that took advantage of the location and the spectacular views of Bishop Peak and Cerro San Luis. The projects were reviewed by juries that included San Luis Obispo city planners.

Designing streetscapes and build-out for expanding the city's downtown along the Lower Higuera Corridor was the challenge laid out by Professors Toker and Combrink to the CRP 203 studios. Students added to their repertoire by considering form-based codes, enhancing their digital graphic capabilities, and creating detailed plan documents (Figure 4). Final presentations were made to a jury that included senior planners from San Luis Obispo and a city planning commissioner.

Strategic Urban Design for Los Osos, CA

Undergraduate Studio: CRP 341 (Fall 2012)

Professor Vicente del Rio guided the 3rd year CRP 341 Urban Design Studio in responding to a request from the the San Luis Obispo County Planning Department and the Los Osos Community Advisory Council (Figure 5). The class was commissioned to work on developing alternative urban design scenarios for three areas in Los Osos: the Los Osos Valley Road and the Baywood Park commercial areas, and a large vacant parcel located at South Bay Boulevard and 18th Street.

The students investigated opportunities and constraints and community expectations through the analysis of existing documents, field visits, on-site questionnaires and interviews, an online survey, and two community workshops. In a final presentation to the Los Osos Community Advisory Council and the community, the students explained their proposals for the three sites and showed how future development could enhance the community's identity, walkability, and attractiveness, and stimulate economic development. This work will help the county planners and the Los Osos Community Advisory Council in the process of developing the Los Osos Community Plan.

Planning and Design Studies for Templeton, CA

Undergraduate Studios: CRP 410/411 (Fall 2012 and Winter 2013)
- see the article on this project in this issue.

With Professor Zeljka Howard as instructor, the fourth year community planning studio was contracted by the San Luis Obispo County Planning and Building Department to assess development opportunities for Templeton, an unincorporated community in northern San Luis Obispo County. Teams were charged with preparing planning and design studies for two areas of particular development potential. A central component of their effort was the extensive public outreach to assess community wishes and identify areas of development potential. In cooperation with Planning Department staff, residents, and business owners, the students conducted three workshops (one with high school students), a focus group workshop, a business survey, stakeholder interviews, and a com-

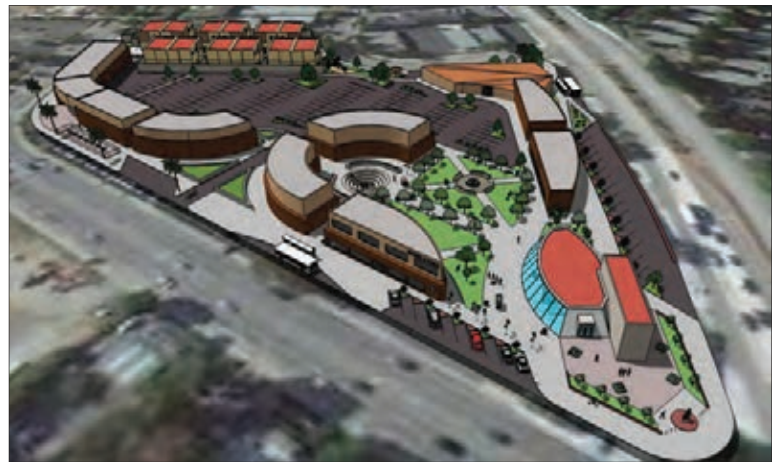


Figure 3: The Foothill project by J. Bonilla and S. Coleman; CRP 202.



Figure 4: South Higuera project by S. Benzel, S. Johnson & H. Shimer; CRP 203.



Figure 5: Los Osos project by A. Levin, P. Minegar & T. Vogt; CRP 203.

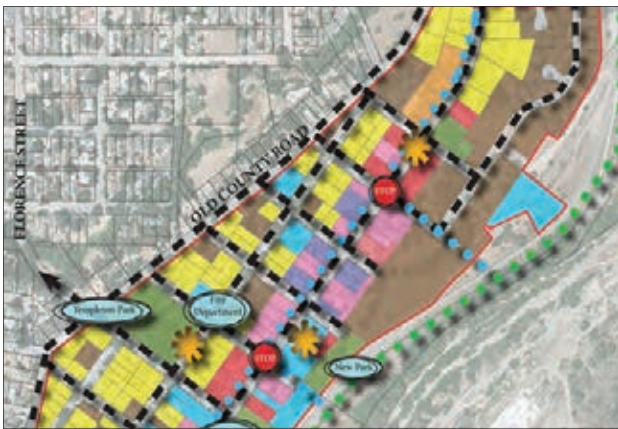


Figure 6: Class proposal for downtown Tempeleton; CRP 410/411.



Figure 7: Vision for Ghenh Rang by Althaus, Banuelos, Bell, Legget & Prestidge; CRP 472.

Figure 8: Project for Old Town Goleta by AH. Cha, K. Day, K. Kiefer, Z. Hackney & M. Walker; CRP 553.



munity opinion survey that was conducted at sites of public worship and online. The work culminated in a public outreach effort and two reports that provided ideas for development of the Downtown and the Ramada Drive Area (Figure 6). County staff will use these documents to inform the 2013 update process of the Tempeleton Community Plan.

Sustainable Visions for the Future of Vietnam

Undergraduate/Graduate Elective Studio: CRP 472 (Winter 2013) - see the article on this project in this issue.

Professors Vicente del Rio and Hemalata Dandekar guided 18 graduate and undergraduate CRP students in an international planning and urban design elective studio to develop schematic plans for the sustainable development of an area in Ghenh Rang, city of Quy Nhon, Vietnam. Students addressed a complex set of cross-cultural challenges in responding to an Organic Design Challenge 2013 directed by the studio of Eric Lloyd Wright. Student teams from three universities—Cal Poly, Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, and the University of Oregon Department of Architecture—were invited to this challenge. They engaged in a visioning design challenge for Vietnam’s first model green village—a 14,000 acre Green Economic Zone located in Quy Nhon, Vietnam. The Cal Poly team’s site offered opportunities to design a project bridging the local—fisheries, existing village, environment, culture—and the global—tourism, medical campus, university, technology zone (Figure 7). The students’ alternative visions for the site will be presented to officials in the Construction Ministry, Vietnam.

Specific Plans for Goleta, CA

Graduate Studio: CRP 553 (Spring 2013)

Professor Umut Toker’s section of the graduate CRP 553 Community Design Studio worked with the City of Goleta to develop three specific plan proposals for Old Town Goleta—Hollister Avenue, the current and historic center of the town. Despite its central location, the area currently lacks an active presence of community members and a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. With the support of the with city planners, the students focused on a new vision for Old Town through a participatory design approach. Three teams of five students each developed alternative proposals based on field observations, community workshops, and extensive in-depth interviews with residents and business owners in busy locations in town, during weekends and community events. The information collected offered an in-depth understanding of community needs and wishes for the area that will be useful as Goleta’s city planners move forward on their plans for Old Town. The student proposals were presented to the City Council at their June 2013 meeting and the community comments were so positive that the City Council added a discussion on the implementation of specific elements of the plans to their following meeting agenda. The student-proposed restriping of Hollister Avenue to accommodate bicyclists was subsequently implemented, and the implementation of other student ideas continues (Figure 8).

Menlo Park Waterfront Vision Plan

Graduate Studio: CRP 553 (Spring 2013)

Professor Kelly Main guided graduate students as they created a vision plan for Menlo Park's waterfront in the Spring Quarter 2013 (Figure 9). Menlo Park is a city of approximately 30,000 people, located north of San Jose along the southwestern part of the San Francisco Bay. The city's waterfront, an approximately 60-acre area, is currently zoned light industrial; however, residential development pressure is on its horizon. Less than a ten-minute bicycle ride is Facebook's headquarters which—with 6,600 employees on its current and expanded campus—will further impact the need for housing. With a median home price of \$750,000 (in 2010), Menlo Park has had difficulty addressing its share of state-mandated affordable housing.

In response to these pressing and divergent housing needs, the City amended its general plan and zoning ordinance to allow higher-density residential development at the center of its industrial waterfront. The City asked the class to develop a "vision plan" through community outreach. The students met with property owners and city staff, and engaged community members in parks, at local community events, and in community centers in a discussion about the future of the waterfront.

This studio provided CRP students a planning challenge that faces waterfront communities throughout the Bay Area: to adapt aging industrial sites to accommodate housing. To address the land-use compatibility issues inherent in such projects, many communities have chosen to simply eliminate industrial uses. Instead, CRP students saw the challenge as an opportunity to expand the concept of a mixed-use neighborhood beyond the typical residential and commercial combination found in many new urbanist plans.

They focused on creating great public spaces to address compatibility concerns. Small, pedestrian-oriented streets provide a buffer between residential and industrial uses and create a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly neighborhood. The bayfront trail—which currently ends at the project's boundaries—is extended through the project area and skirts a small plaza intended for both day- and night-time activities. The design includes informative exhibits and public art to educate visitors regarding climate change and sea-level rise. A new pedestrian/bicycle bridge will improve connection to the rest of Menlo Park, which is separated from the project area by Highway 101.

The students' plans were at once contemporary and respectful of the area's industrial history: a mixed-use area that includes apartments, small-scale retail, and jobs and small businesses provided by the light industrial uses. These urban design plan alternatives were presented at a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission in early June.



Figures 9a & b: Menlo Park Waterfront Vision Plan; CRP

City of Bell

Graduate Studios: CRP 552/554 (Fall 2012 and Winter 2013)

Professors Chris Clark and Kelly Main's Community Planning Studio engaged in planning for the City of Bell, a small city with a predominantly Hispanic population and indistinguishable from dozens of similar municipalities in the Los Angeles basin. However, Bell was beleaguered by corruption: guided by the city manager, the City Council accepted large salaries for little or no effort, while the city manager paid himself more than a million dollars per year. His largess is legendary; he became a poster child for the Tea Party, the ultimate exposé for the argument that government needs to be dramatically reduced.

The CRP department decided to provide planning assistance to Bell, to attempt to make good on the promise of planning and the planning profession in a context where it was absent. Graduate students, equipped with humility and an ability to communicate in Spanish, engaged the citizens of Bell. Expecting anger and mistrust, they instead found people ready to get back to the business of governance. The community was eager to talk about the things that had always mattered: public safety, education, parks, and good housing.

Through this class focus on community participation and inclusion, students reached out to people where they lived, shopped, and played (Figure 10). The lesson was that if one stands at City Hall waiting to hear from people one will only hear from those who frequent City Hall. The student teams addressed issues of



Figure 10: Community visioning exercise, City of Bell; CRP 552/554.

economic revitalization along commercial corridors, improving the city climate and air quality, and developing the recreation potential of the L.A. River corridor that bounds the city. They also looked for opportunities to increase the stock of affordable housing, enhance the security of its citizens, and restore confidence in the City of Bell. The bad leaders are gone from Bell but the good citizens remain, and they are ready for planning.

City of Clearlake General Plan Update

Graduate Studios: CRP 552/554 (Fall 2012 and Winter 2013)

Professor Cornelius Nuworsoo’s CRP 552/554 studio prepared an administrative draft General Plan for the City of Clearlake.

Figure 11: Clearlake General Plan Update; CRP 552/554.

The studio included 14 graduate students who collaborated with residents and city leaders in formulating a development scenario to accommodate projected population, and jobs and housing needs, by 2040. Located in Northern California, 80 miles north of San Francisco in rural Lake County, Clearlake is 10.8 square miles and sits on the southern shore of Clear Lake, the largest natural freshwater lake entirely within California. With a total population of 15,250 residents (2010 U.S. Census), the racial composition of Clearlake is predominantly white (73 percent) while 21 percent of the population is Latino. In 2010, the median household income in Clearlake was \$26,382 compared to the Lake County and California state median incomes of \$41,182 and \$60,883 per household, respectively.

The project involved a thorough analysis and comprehensive update of the City’s General Plan. The General Plan includes detailed long-term goals, objectives, policies, and programs to inform future development on eleven Elements: Economic Development; Land Use; Circulation; Conservation; Housing; Public Facilities; Safety; Health; Open Space; Noise; and Community Design. The plan was guided by comprehensive research on community characteristics and on opportunities and constraints for development as well as on public feedback. The General Plan can position Clearlake to improve the quality of life for residents, provide diverse housing options, generate economic vitality for the city, and develop a vibrant destination to draw visitors from near and far.

The class presented the city with three distinct alternative growth scenarios. The Preferred Growth Scenario for 2040 reflects a combination of features from all three scenarios to not only accommodate projected population and employment growth, but also reflect community concerns for conservation and additional amenities for residents.

As shown in the Proposed Land Use Map (Figure 11), development is focused along: (1) Austin Park; (2) Olympic Drive Corridor (from Austin Park to State Route 53); (3) Lakeshore Drive Corridor (from Old Highway 53 to Austin Park); (4) Gateway at State Route 53 intersection with Lakeshore Drive; (5) The Avenues; (6) Regional Shopping Center (Wal-Mart/Airport Area); (7) Ogulin Canyon Industrial Center (northeastern corner of the City); (8) an area for agriculture.

