

## Spotlight

# Learning from California: Highlights of CRP Studios 2015/2016 AY

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*Dr. Hemalata Dandekar highlights the studio projects from both BSCRIP and MCRIP programs during the 2015-16 academic year. The studios are fundamental in the learn-by-doing pedagogy embraced by the department, and they help shape students into professionals that are fully engaged with their communities.*

This article on learning from California in our CRP studios will be the last one I author. In initiating these Learning from California essays in Focus VII (2010), when I joined the faculty as CRP Department Head, I hoped to spotlight a signature element of our planning curriculum - an exceptionally strong series of required planning studios offered in both the BSCRIP and the MCRIP degree programs.

As studio instructor for over three and a half decades in institutions across the US and abroad, I was keenly aware that CRP's strength in studio instruction played an important role in placing CRP Cal Poly in a preeminent position in planning schools across the country. That first overview of studios that were taught in 2009 - their locations, range, content and goals - illustrated why Cal Poly's strong and vibrant studio-based instruction is recognized across the country. It corroborated that finding city sponsorship for our studios has been embraced by our faculty, despite the additional pressures and concerns this responsibility places on the studio instructor. This commitment to the studio pedagogy has been reinforced in CRP as we have observed, year after year, how effective a carefully tailored studio sequence serves to ratchet up student skills, comprehension, and ability to describe, communicate, synthesize, integrate and innovate.

Having stepped down as Department Head in Fall 2016, I join the studio faculty ranks with enthusiasm and leave to others the task of framing overviews of activities in our department. The seven papers on studio teaching that followed in successive issues of FOCUS foreground the contributions that CRP's community embedded, service-learning-driven work offers in furthering the talents and skills of our students. Intrinsicly involved in the physical planning of our cities and neighborhoods this studio work has been of benefit to the communities with whom we have engaged.

The CRP planning studios during the 2015/16 Academic Year enabled our students to work in contexts that provided a diversity of situations for urban analysis and visioning. In performing the

work student learning what is at the core of our concern and commitment, and, importantly, the work also meet the needs of our host communities. Finding a balance between pedagogic mandates and community-client needs makes studio teaching especially challenging and invigorating. Studio faculty have welcomed this as an opportunity to spur students and themselves to higher levels of accountability and professionalism. Most upper division undergraduate and graduate masters studios received financial support from the host client-communities this past year. These resources were used to subvent student travel, support production of deliverables and procure special equipment and supplies uniquely needed for the work.

The studio work undertaken in 2015-16 is summarized here. Full-length reports are available upon request or from Cal Poly Library's Digital Commons.

**Undergraduate Studio:** CRP 201 Basic Graphic Skills (Fall 2016). *Professors Amir Hajrasuliha and Woody Combrink.*

In this studio, students acquire basic graphic communication skills and urban design concepts through design development of a site. The Wells Fargo parking lot on the south-west corner of Marsh and Broad in San Luis Obispo has long been used as the project area for this exploration. It is a manageable site which allows students to apply newly acquired skills to a small urban design project and to explore site opportunities, constraints, circulation, and ways to enhance pedestrian friendly environments.

**Undergraduate Studio:** CRP 202 Urban Design Studio I (Winter 2016). *Professors Vicente del Rio and Amir Hajrasuliha.*

This studio introduces students to the urban design process and increases their design skills. Students addressed a strategic site in San Luis Obispo at the north-west corner of Nipomo Street and Higuera Street. They undertook assignments to complete established phases of a site design problem namely



Figure 1: Proposal for a plaza in downtown San Luis Obispo, by Willow Urquidi; CRP 201.

Figure 2: Proposal for the redevelopment of an area in downtown SLO, by Sabrina Meleo and Alyssa Chung; CRP 202.



Figure 3: Adaptive reuse of the Morro Bay Power Plant, by Amy Gunn, Connor Lavi and Kenzie Wrage; CRP 203.



site analysis, conceptual development, design development, visualization, design document development, visual / verbal presentation. These exercises exposed students to the basics of functional, regulatory, economic, and social factors that influence urban design. The urban design challenge consisted of developing residential as well as retail commercial land uses.

**Undergraduate Studio:** CRP 203 Urban Design Studio II (Spring 2016). Professors Amir Hajrasulih and Woody Combrink.

The site surrounding Morro Bay power plant was the focus of this third urban design studio. The course built on the knowledge that students acquired in CRP 201 and 202, and advanced their understanding of the planning process and of graphic, written, and verbal communication. Substantively this studio was focused on issues of post-industrial development and waterfront development. Students refined their skills in three-dimensional spatial design, program development and computer applications. And, the course encouraged students ability to problem solve and think critically in the field of urban design.

**Undergraduate Studio:** CRP 341 Urban Design Studio III (Fall 2015). Professor Vicente del Rio.

The studio focused on developing specific plan alternatives for Froom Ranch, in San Luis Obispo. The 111-acres parcel is located within the city's sphere of influence west of Los Osos Valley Road between the Irish Hills shopping plaza to the north, the Courtyard and Hampton Inn hotels to the south, and the Irish Hills open area reserve to the east. Accessibility is excellent with an almost direct access to Highway 101 and there is a good level of commercial activity in the immediate surroundings. These factors make the site an ideal location for creating a walkable mixed-use development. But the natural conditions are challenging with limited flat areas and significant grade changes closer to Irish Hills, a seasonal creek, and a flood zone. The recently adopted Land Use Element of the City's General Plan identifies the site as requiring a specific plan, currently being developed by RRM Design Group. With support from RRM and the land owner, and based on their programmatic requirements, the class was broken into five teams who developed different planning solutions for mixed-use, mixed-typology, walkable, and sustainable communities.

**Undergraduate Studio:** CRP 410/411 (Fall 2015 and Winter 2016) Community Planning Laboratory I and II. Professors Adrienne Greve and Chris Clark.

In 2015, Chancellor White adopted a 2040 greenhouse gas reduction goal of 80% below 1990 emissions for the entire California State University (CSU) system. Cal Poly is one of seven CSU campuses who signed the Second Nature climate agreement committing the campus to both GHG reduction and climate change adaptation actions. Our campus extended the Chancellor's target to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. The first step in fulfilling these goals and commitments is to inventory current emissions, assess existing actions and

policy, and develop a climate action plan (CAP). The 2015-2016 community-planning studio took on these tasks.

The class efforts were broken into seven sector teams, each integral to addressing climate change: Agriculture, Buildings, Campus Life, Renewable Energy, Solid Waste, Transportation, and Water. In addition to sector teams, each student served on a task team. These teams pursued a variety of efforts necessary to develop a Draft Climate Action Plan (CAP) for Cal Poly over the course of two quarters. The first quarter focused on gathering data to document and understand current conditions on campus. Best practices from other city and campus CAPs and related guidance documents were compiled and reviewed for potential strategies relevant to Cal Poly. The second quarter of the course focused on CAP development. Throughout the CAP process, outreach efforts assure that the Cal Poly community has the opportunity to share its hopes for the future of Cal Poly and current campus needs.

**Graduate Studio:** CRP 553 (Spring 2016) Project Planning and Design Studio. *Professors Vicente del Rio and Amir Hajrasuliha.*

The City of Ventura's Planning Department needed an urban design vision for a "Wellness District" in the city's Midtown district and was the client for this studio. The idea emanated from a 2013 workshop led by Ventura City and the Urban Land Institute, and a response to the on-going multimillion-dollar expansion projects of Ventura's Community Memorial Hospital and the County's Medical Center, both located in the area, and the increase in associated medical services. The studio was asked to work on a vision that could leverage a mix of retail, eateries, offices, and residential uses whose impact on the surrounding community and the city as a whole would be highly positive.

Intensive research, on-site and on-line surveys led the class to a vision with associated goals, objectives, ideas, and a concept diagram which were reviewed by the city staff. The class then developed their final proposals for the public and the private domains, as well as for a "core area", identified as a fundamental to leverage the first development phase and connect with Ventura's downtown and the rest of the city. The *Midtown Wellness District Urban Design Vision Plan* was presented to the public in the Ventura City Hall on Friday June 3, 2016, and a final report was delivered to the city at the end of the summer. The plan received an award from the Central Coast APA and is discussed in some more detail in an article appearing at this FOCUS's Faculty & Student Section.

**Graduate Studio:** CRP 552/554 (Fall 2015 & Winter 2016) Community and Regional Planning Studio I and II.

*Section 1: Professor Cornelius Nuworsoo.*

This section of the two-quarter long MCRP Graduate Planning Studio prepared a comprehensive revision and replacement of the City of Weed's three-decades-old General Plan. The studio collaborated with residents, stakeholders, and city leaders

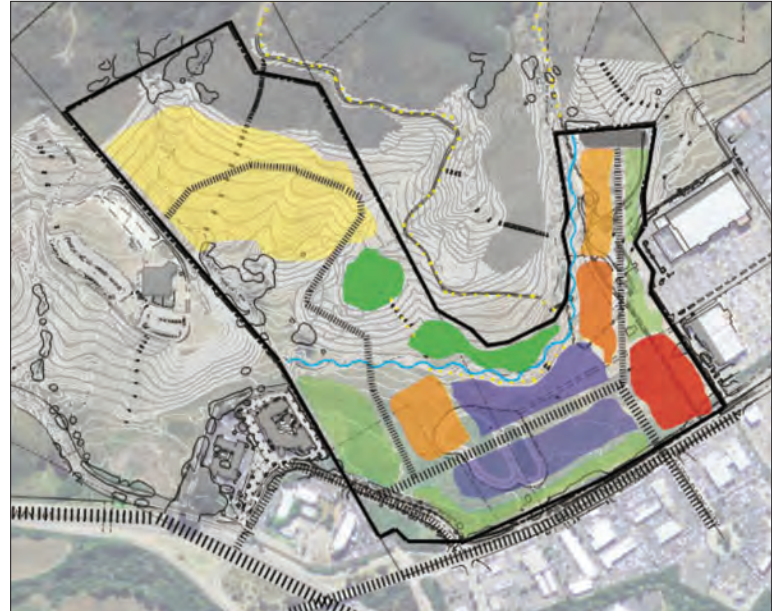


Figure 4: Caballo Place, proposal for a mixed-use community at Froom Ranch, SLO by Horwitz, Luu, Ricklefs & Sandzimier; CRP 341.

Figure 5: A student-led participatory session on campus during the process towards a the Draft Climate Action Plan for Cal Poly; CRP 410/411.



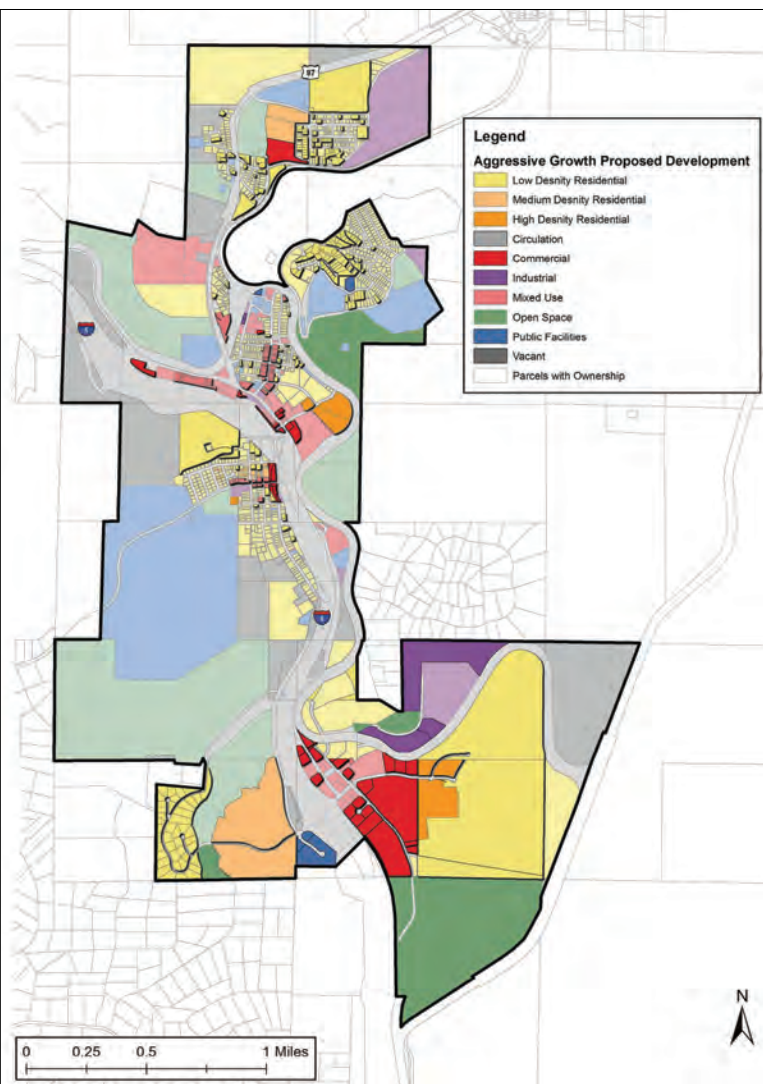


Figure 6: Proposed land-use map for the General Plan Update, City of Weed; CRP 552/554.

Figure 7: MCRP students talking to the citizens advisory committee at Lemon Grove; CRP 552/554.



in formulating a development scenario to accommodate aspirations for growth in population, housing, and jobs by 2040. The City of Weed is a small, mountain town located in Siskiyou County about 70 miles north of Redding, CA and 50 miles south of the Oregon/California border at the intersection of Interstate 5 (I-5) and US Route 97 (US 97). Weed occupies 5 square miles within a sphere of influence of about 28 square miles of timberland. With a total population of 2,967 residents (2010 U.S. Census), the ethnic composition of Weed is predominantly White (65 percent). In 2010, the median household income in Weed was \$28,170 compared to the Siskiyou County and California state median incomes of \$37,709 and \$60,883 per household, respectively.

The project involved a thorough analysis and comprehensive update of the City's General Plan. The administrative draft General Plan includes detailed long-term goals, objectives, policies, and programs to inform future development on twelve Elements: Economic Development; Land Use; Circulation; Conservation; Housing; Public Facilities; Safety; Health; Open Space; Noise; Community Design, and Air Quality. 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 Weed to improve the quality of life for residents, provide diverse housing options, generate economic vitality for the city, and enhance its attraction as a service center for travellers between major cities to its north and south.

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 and captures community desires: (a) for vibrant, walkable, and attractive neighborhoods; (b) to preserve the City's character; (c) to provide an adequate and diverse supply of housing; and (d) to increase the number of jobs within the City.

As shown in the Proposed Land Use Map (Figure 6), development is focused in six key areas: (1) Angel Valley; (2) Historic Downtown; (3) Creekside Village; (4) North / South Weed Boulevard Corridor; (5) Bel Air; and (6) South Weed. The first five areas focus on neighborhood commercial centers, and the sixth area expands the City's highway-serving commercial development.

Section 2: Professor Kelly Main

In 2015-2016, one of MCRP's two graduate comprehensive planning studios was hired by the City of Lemon Grove, California, to update its general plan. Lemon Grove is a compact community of 3.8 square miles located near Downtown San Diego. Approximately 26,000 people live in the City, making it the fourth-smallest city in San Diego County. The studio's contract with Lemon Grove grew out of a graduate student's summer internship. When Rose Kelly, then a first-year graduate student in the MCRP program, started her internship in summer 2015, she found that the majority of Lemon Grove's General Plan had not been substantially updated since the 1990s. Ms.

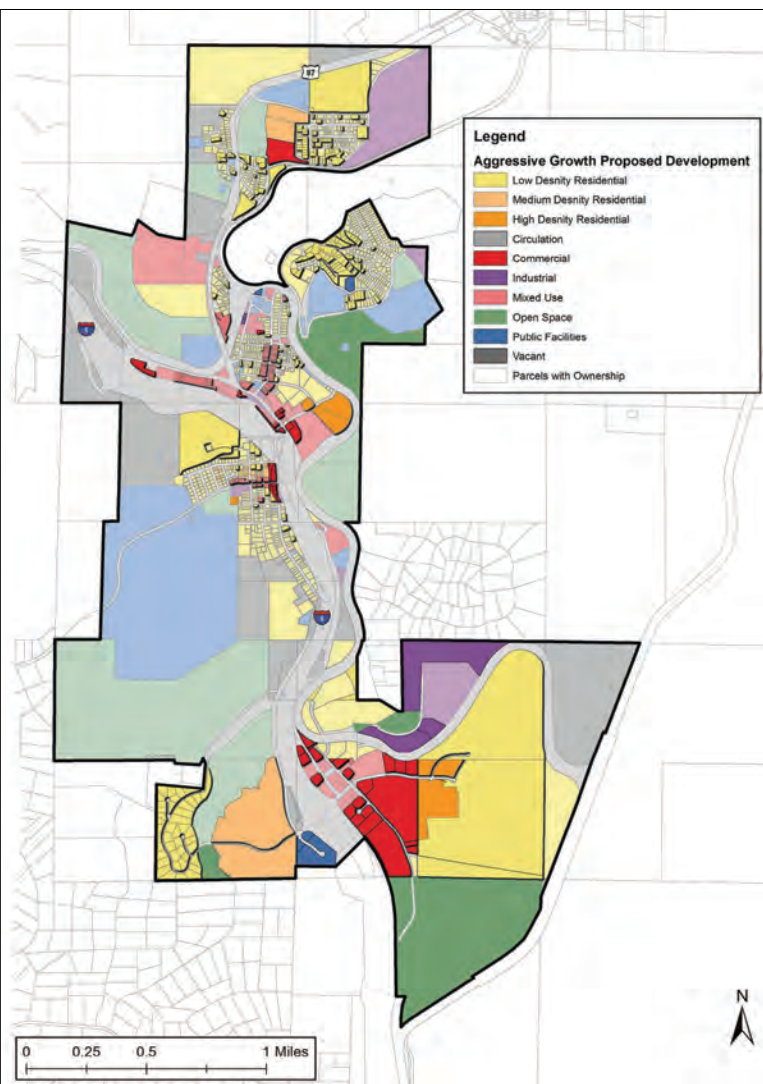


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Kelly's description of Cal Poly's comprehensive planning studio led the City Council to hire the studio and create a citizens advisory committee to provide the students with ideas and input (Figure 6).

The fourteen students in the studio, with their advisor Professor Kelly Main, engaged in one of the most extensive community engagement processes undertaken by a Cal Poly studio. In the two-quarter course studio, the students reached out to more than 120 high school students and 500 hundred adults, through: an online survey; in-person interviews at local holiday events (Figure 7), grocery stores (Figure 8) and local businesses; and focus group meetings at a local church, with the chamber of commerce and at a local high school. The students ideas focused on three areas—community culture and identity, downtown improvements, and infrastructure and design. The student's general plan is now in the hands of the City's Development Services Director, Dave De Vries, who, with a local consultant, is shepherding the document through the public review process for adoption sometime in 2017.

The Lemon Grove studio process and work can be see at: <http://lemongrovegp.wixsite.com/imaginelemongrove>



Figure 8: An MCRP student interviewing a Lemon Grove resident during a holiday event; CRP 552/554.

Figure 9: MCRP students during a participatory event at a Lemon Grove grocery store; CRP 552/554.

