Hello Sooner Planners!

We, at the University of Oklahoma, are steadfast in our belief that planning transforms the lives of all we touch. This is why we have made the commitment to work with our students to reach as many communities as possible. While we have always served Oklahoma communities as a part of our Community Planning Studio, the Regional and City Planning faculty has risen to the challenge, envisioning new ways to take their students into the field as a part of the majority of the classes we offer. We believe that applied learning prepares our students for the challenging careers ahead of them, stressing the importance of going beyond the books to learn about planning practice. These activities challenge and invigorate our students!

Practice-based learning provides an interesting platform around which many of the faculty have shaped their research agenda. Bryce Lowery’s assessment of food availability is a prime example of this connection, as further described below. This type of applied research is important as we try to grow national knowledge of the types of planning issues that are relevant to the south central region of the United States and, more specifically, Oklahoma.

We’ve also embraced the opportunity to take our students abroad. John Harris has just returned from taking a second interdisciplinary team of students from the College of Architecture to Zambia, Africa. In this newsletter, Eric Hill, a second-year student in the Master’s of Regional and City Planning program, recounts the impact of the experience.

We continue to strive to bring practitioners into the classroom. The Institute for Quality Communities conference brought planning experts from around the world to inspire our students to “think big”. The presentations and interactions with these experts were a game-changer for many. OU will host the National Sign Education and Research Conference on Oct. 11 and 12. The Signage Foundation, the champion of the on-premise sign industry, is excited to come to Oklahoma, and seeks to celebrate the state’s Route 66 heritage as a part of its theme. You are most welcome to attend and to earn CM credits for your participation.

We are always looking for new opportunities and partners for service learning and research initiatives. Please reach out to me (dawnjourdan@ou.edu or (405) 325-3502) if you would like to explore new frontiers with us.

Enjoy your summer!
Dawn Jourdan
Director of the Division of Regional and City Planning
RCPL PARTNERS WITH REAGAN ELEMENTARY ON THE BETTER PLACES PROJECT

By Dawn Jourdan

Director of the Division of Regional and City Planning

As a Reagan Elementary School parent, I worked with the school administrators, teachers and staff to design the “Better Places Project,” which sought to engage Reagan’s schoolchildren in a place-based learning activity. Interested teachers were paired with volunteer students (Lora Gwartney, Danielle Barker and Vanessa Morrison), staff (Allison Anderson and Tony Naranjo), and faculty from OU’s College of Architecture (myself, Meghan Wieters and Bryce Lowery). This project involved two administrators, 14 teachers, eight OU volunteers, and more than 300 students.

Together, the teacher and the volunteers devised a plan for introducing their classes to the concept of placemaking. Subsequently, the teachers implemented an arts-based project in their classrooms that enabled students to transform photographs that they had taken of places they would like to see improved in their neighborhoods into works of art.
This art was prepared in a two week period and displayed at the Reagan Elementary Art Show and Auction on April 25, 2015. The Better Places Project was mounted in the school’s cafeteria for viewing. Students who participated in this project, along with their parents and their teachers, made presentations of their work to Norman city leaders, including: Mayor Cindy Rosenthal (OU Professor of Political Science), Planning Commissioner Dave Boeck (OU Professor of Architecture, and City Planning Director Susan Connors (Member of the Regional and City Planning Board of Visitors). Each asked the students questions about their ideas and commended the creativity and ingenuity of their art and their ideas.
Professor John Harris just returned from leading the second installment of the college's Study Abroad Program in Zambia, Africa. This article, written by student Eric Hill, characterizes the life-changing nature of the opportunity.

Looking out the small plane window as we landed, I caught my first glimpse of my new home for the next couple weeks, Lusaka, Zambia. Miles of lush forests and hills spotted with unplanned developments and fires from the creation of charcoal is the harsh contrast of peri-urban dwellings in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. The Sooners in Zambia program led by OU faculty Dr. John Harris and Dave Boeck had the task of assisting Family Legacy, (a faith-based NGO) design better primary schools for the over 10,000 at-risk children they serve.

With a strict and packed schedule, we hit the ground sprinting and began with tours of a handful of schools that Family Legacy had either built from the ground up with block and mortar structures, built as modular semi-permanent classrooms, or as retrofitted buildings throughout the various compounds of Lusaka. It was in the first couple days that we got to meet the bright young minds that we would be helping and what the organization considers, “the next 50 years” of Zambia. The children were overjoyed to have visitors and classes nearly came to a halt when we took our tours as the children peaked out of their windows to watch us go room to room to inspect.

As the trip continued, we split into groups and held focus groups, charrettes, and photovoice sessions to not only gather information on the schools themselves and what could be done to make them better, but to empower and give the children critical thinking skills and techniques that could be used to enhance their own neighborhoods. It was in these meetings with the students and teachers that I felt that we were truly making a positive impact in the lives of others and these experiences have changed my outlook on life and will shape my future career as a planning professional.
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF GRIFFIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
By Bryce Lowery
Assistant Professor
Division of Regional and City Planning

During the 2015 spring semester, students enrolled in the Subdivision and Planned United Development Planning course had the pleasure of imagining a new future for the current site of Griffin Memorial Hospital. Under my direction, students embarked on a site planning exercise that synthesized best practices in the field of planning as well as input from local experts who are intimately acquainted with the history, opportunities and constraints of the site.

In recent years, the once self-sustaining mental health facility has fallen into disrepair. Owned by the state but located adjacent to one of the oldest residential neighborhoods in Norman, the facility is physically isolated and burdened with aging infrastructure. With increasing numbers of homeless youth and a growing population of returning veterans in need of mental health services, the state and city became interested in exploring options for redeveloping the site to better address the ongoing need of clients and the residents of Norman.

Students were first charged with conducting an assessment of the conditions of the site. This included an investigation into the history of Griffin Memorial, an inventory of existing buildings, landscaping, soil and topography as well as an assessment of the social conditions of the nearby community. Students were able to tour the site and talk with staff about their hopes and desires for the future of the mental health facility.

Additionally, a number of experts from the city and the College of Architecture visited with the students to share their knowledge and encourage students to think broadly about the possibilities of the site. Staff from the city’s storm water management office and faculty from the Division of Landscape Architecture shared their perspectives on the environmental and natural aspects of the site. Susan Connors, Director of Planning for the City or Norman, shared much about the history and evolution of the site and discussed the unique challenges associated with planning for state owned property located within the jurisdiction of a municipality. Other members of the College of Architecture faculty discussed the connectivity of the site, encouraging the students to think about the variety of ways users might be able to access the site via automobile, bicycle and foot.

For their final project, students were required to create a website that illustrated design strategies both graphically and through text. Many of the resulting designs suggested a number of insightful and imaginative ideas. Many imagined a mixed-use site and a greater presence for the University of Oklahoma – particularly social work, psychology, and public health. Students also imagined a new hospital complete with modernized facilities, therapeutic gardens and overnight places for family and visitors. In addition, students saw an opportunity to better link the site to downtown Norman with amenities for the nearby community including and aquatic center, sculpture gardens, an arboretum, and a diversity of housing options.
LAND USE LAW STUDENTS EXPLORE IMPLICATIONS OF FBC WITH NORMAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

By Ian Carlton
Director, Institute for Quality Communities
Wick Cary Professor

On March 9th, 2015, the OU Institute for Quality Communities (IQC) hosted a Development Workshop at OU’s College of Architecture. Students from the Division of Regional and City Planning presented their development analyses for an assignment in their course, “RCPL 5203: Land Use Controls,” and received input from Norman community members who were stakeholders in the Center City Vision study area. This document discusses OU student, faculty and staff reflections on the workshop dialogue.

OU students enrolled in “RCPL 5203: Land Use Controls” participated in the workshop. Most of the students in the course were Regional and City Planning masters students, though students from other degree programs were enrolled in the course. During the class, students learned about the array of land use policies that govern development of the built environment. Zoning codes and development bulk controls were particular foci of the course.

As part of the course, the students were assigned a project that asked them to consider distinctions between the existing zoning and proposed form-based code for specific locations within the City of Norman's Center City Vision study area. In particular, students focused on real estate development potential under the two codes. At the request of OU faculty, the City of Norman Planning Department identified “opportunity sites” in the Center City Vision study area for the student analyses.

Each student considered the potential for development, including physical form, land use, and financial feasibility, for an “opportunity site” under two distinct land use control regimes. First, students considered development potential under the existing City of Norman zoning code. Second, they considered development under the proposed Center City Form-based Code. Based on their analyses, the students produced posters summarizing their analyses.

The students presented their posters to community stakeholders—local landowners, developers, and Center City Vision steering committee members—at the development workshop on March 9th.

During the workshop, the students sought feedback on their assignments from stakeholders who had insights into the political and market dynamics of real estate investment in the Norman Center City vicinity. Students presented their work to the stakeholders in one-on-one or small group discussions.
Following the workshop, students who participated in the event were asked to write one-page reflections on their workshop experiences. Additionally, each student was asked to identify ways in which both the existing City of Norman Zoning Code and proposed Center City Form-based Code could be modified to further encourage or discourage development on the sites that they studied. These ideas were summarized and share with the City and the project consultant.

RCPL student Brooke Mortimer shares her site analysis with Center City Vision Steering Committee Member Cynthia Rogers

Community stakeholders discuss OU student projects