Lessons from Five Service-Learning Projects

Keywords: service learning, campus planning, open space, housing, winery

This paper examines five service-learning projects that the author undertook for his design studios over the last five years. The focus of this investigation is to identify the patterns in acquiring, researching and designing the projects, and then to evaluate the learning experience of the students.

These projects include a destination resort for a major winery, a housing community, and the central iconic spaces of three major university campuses in the USA. The paper explains how the projects were organized, how the stakeholders participated, and how the reviews were conducted at various stages of the design process. It also shares the insight the author gained from the constraints and opportunities in working with real clients.

The paper discusses the level of student motivation, engagement and seriousness in collecting, researching, generating design goals and preparing the programs, exploring design options and converting them into coherent design solutions, and then presenting to the clients. It also includes the assessment of students' satisfaction and confidence as well as the clients' benefit in receiving a wide range of design solutions that they could not get by hiring professional offices.

The conclusion contains comments on the pros and cons of undertaking service-learning projects and what steps should be taken to ensure that the learning objectives of the courses are enhanced rather than compromised. The author also shares his insight as to what kind of courses and design studios are most appropriate given the variety of projects and clients, and how the courses or design studios should be adjusted to get the most out of them with regard to their learning objectives.

--Professor Omar Faruque