

## **Innovative Ideas- UNC Greensboro**

**Category:** Public Service

**Project Name:** urban studio [us]

**The Idea:** Since the fall of 2005, the Department of Interior Architecture has been working with the City of Greensboro's Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to implement a dwelling replacement program. This program was developed in response to the need for the revitalization of homes that have been condemned or have fallen into severe disrepair. A sustainable partnership has been forged between the university, the community, and local government that has allowed students to gain valuable hands-on experience in designing and building homes for deserving families in the city's Glenwood neighborhood.

In addition to our funding partner, the urban studio has developed lasting affiliations with a number of public and private partners. This project demonstrates the potential for University service-learning projects to become implemented models for inner-city revitalization projects.

**Project Execution:** The intended site for [us] is selected by The City of Greensboro and the funding for materials is granted by the City's Department of Housing and Community Development. Administrative support is provided by UNCG and City of Greensboro staff. Each design-build project is intended to be contained in one academic semester.

**External Impact:** The urban studio positively impacts the community at large on many levels. It is leading by offering an unprecedented model for revitalizing inner-city neighborhoods. HCD, the Housing Coalition and Healthy Homes Greensboro will undoubtedly benefit from the accelerated design/build knowledge set forth by [us]. Beyond merely replacing houses, [us] is dedicated to promoting innovative and responsible design/build practices with respect to the human and natural environment. The first [us] project created a sustainable network of at least 15 partners, sponsors, and affiliates working towards better quality affordable housing. [us] was a great success with the community as well, as seen by the praise it received from municipal and state elected officials as well as local and national media.

**Internal Impact:**

- Incredible gain of design knowledge for students through hands-on experience and dealing with real-life situations.
- Teamwork, rarely emphasized in typical design studios, is indispensable in the Urban Studio. In addition, students get to experience the human and social sides of the design process. In the Urban Studio, negotiating between student intent, real homeowners, budgets and the building safety issues is an integral part of the design experience.

- Most importantly, students will have the opportunity to pro-actively impact their environment and witness firsthand the incredible value of community-minded projects.
- Urban Studio affords faculty a teaching tool that reaches far beyond “paper” design. The physical building and its archived artifacts, gathered during construction, serve as invaluable visuals.
- Urban Studio has become a research laboratory for testing material applications, new technology, innovative construction processes, design principles, and for the study of social/behavioral issues. Data can now be collected during construction, as part of post-occupancy evaluations and life-cycle studies.
- Urban Studio has been the catalyst for inter-departmental research and collaboration. IAR faculty have teamed up with the Social Work Department and the Office of Leadership and Service Learning.

**Contact Info:**

Robert Michel Charest  
Assistant Professor, Director of the urban studio [us]  
Department of Interior Architecture  
School of Human Environmental Sciences  
UNC Greensboro  
336-402-3189 (phone)  
336-334-5049 (fax)  
rmchares@uncg.edu