

# design studio for Westside

**Dan Gonzalez**, lecturer of the UTSA College of Architecture, led his 34 third-year architectural students, in a studio project to “re-imagine” the city’s near west side during last Spring semester. The project’s intent was to develop architectural designs that would revitalize the Westside community, which has a long and rich cultural history. Gonzalez has longstanding links with area leaders, having served as a board member and interim director of the **Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center**, and introduced his students to various individuals and organizations at the heart of the district, giving them the opportunity to make direct inquiries and firsthand assessments of the community’s needs and desires.

The Westside community has traditionally been marginalized and underserved. Even the proximity of UTSA’s downtown campus has done little to benefit the area and Gonzalez felt it was important for his students to become involved by offering creative design solutions that, if built, would revitalize the neighborhood.

The students had opportunities to engage and interview local activists, artists, and community leaders such as **George Cisneros**, a well-known artist, musician, and resident of the area. Cisneros shared the rich history of the Westside, from its origins as a ranch settled by Mexican immigrants to the present - a poor but proud community with Mexican culture and agrarian traditions.

In addition, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, which runs programs for dance, music, visual arts, and theatre, plays an important cultural role in the community. Several projects were developed for it, including a Conjunto Hall of Fame Museum, Culinary School, and Music Hall. **San Anto Cultural Arts**, another important organization in the Westside, worked with the students to design a new space that included classrooms, office space, and a large gallery. The **American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Missions** also worked with the students to design a museum of their own. Overall the projects ranged from museums, music halls, and libraries to student housing, open air markets, and youth centers.

Midterm presentations were made to the community at a charrette on March 25 and the final presentation was made at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center’s Galeria Tonantzin. Dr. **Jesse Zapata**, UTSA’s Vice Provost for the Downtown Campus, made opening remarks and other speakers included then Councilwoman **Lourdes Galvan**; **Oscar Ramirez**, Director of the Avenida Guadalupe Association; and **Patty Ortiz** the Director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Feedback from community leaders, including the Director for the Office of Cultural Affairs **Felix Padron**, was overwhelmingly positive, with support for the student housing option. Although the student projects were theoretical in nature, they were able to establish a vision of what the Westside could become with creativity and public support.

