

Raymond Russell Park 2 - design/build

Following an educational model that has become increasingly popular at top architectural schools across the nation, the UTSA college of Architecture has added a “design-build” program to its list of educational offerings. The program provides students the opportunity to make a tangible contribution to the development of their community while simultaneously gaining real world experience and earning credit towards a degree.

Design-build studios provide real world project opportunities without competing with local design firms by undertaking “service” projects that have no design budget. In the spring of 2009, UTSA architecture students under the direction of professor **Diane Hays**, completed work at Raymond Russell Park in north Bexar County for the parks department. Hays answered questions about the project and the design build program as follows.



Photo by Andy Catillo



NL: How does a design build studio work?

DH: In the case of the Raymond Russell project, student designs were generated at the UTSA department of architecture for new park facilities, presented to county officials and ultimately approved by Kevin Wolff the county commissioner of precinct three. Once approved, contracts were negotiated between the county and UTSA college of architecture to have students do the work under the direction of a county contractor. Students enroll for a semester, but the county contracts are ongoing, so for instance, three consecutive studio groups worked on the Raymond Russell project. Around twenty students are involved in each project and initially students were on site three days a week. This proved inefficient for the county and contractor, so in the most recent project, student enrolled in a three credit course running in conjunction with the six credit studio which enabled students to be on site 5 days a week.

NL: What does a design build studio offer that the standard studio does not?

DH: The design-build format gives students hands on experience in building what they design. They understand the sequencing of work, processes for fabrication, time management, and even seemingly simple things like establishing dimensions, elevations and straight lines across a site. They also learn how the fabrication of one element affects many elements to follow. While other course offerings may have a specific focus, the design build format exposes students to the full range of activities from conception to design and permitting through actual construction. The process provides students with a comprehensive overview of how the various facets of the profession are integrated.

NL: What is the most rewarding aspect of the program?

DH: The design build format demands a significant commitment and provides an intensity of experience that has the potential to transform students and deepen their perspective of the field.

NL: What are the difficulties and drawbacks of the program?

DH: For the college, design build studios present additional organizational challenges. There are contracts to be negotiated, permissions to be submitted as well as safety and skill training to be performed. Legal liability considerations and insurances have to be addressed. The complications are justified by the end result however.