

An Experience of Growth

Participating in a research project for my Connecting Experience has altered my views on architecture and on my own future career path in more ways than I thought possible. Going into this experience, I had an isolationist perspective on buildings. I saw them as shelters serving functionalist human needs with aesthetics tacked on to appeal to viewers. I did not see architecture as a chance to shift world perspective on the future. I did not see architecture as a chance to give back to the earth. I did not see buildings as fluid, living things themselves. My blinders were quickly removed by the help of Architectural Engineering professor and practitioner, Gregory Brooks, and his AE World Map project, refining my BDP strand topic of “Regenerative Architecture” and unexpectedly clarifying my future career path.

Professor Brooks’ AE World Map project focuses on giving recognition to *all* the contributors to an architectural site. Oftentimes the well-known names of architecture firms are the only names associated with a project, overriding the many, many other people who actually make a project happen. AE World Map works to break down this wall while simultaneously bringing attention to the innovative work that happens in all corners of the world. Modern societies often take control of architecture, seeming like the most innovative and technologically advanced communities. But this is far from true. Many of the most inspiring and needed works happen in small towns and rural outbacks. It is time for these techniques to be spread across the world, putting them on the “map” alongside well-known projects. AE World Map produces a blog with posts featuring researched sites – naming all contributors alongside photos, architectural plans, specific interests, and featured techniques. As I worked on the team this spring, I spent my weeks researching new sites, specifically ones that fostered ideas of “Regenerative Architecture.” I dove into the architectural terms and systems in which I lacked knowledge, learning more about sustainable design. My research flowed into content creation for blog posts, further populating the AE World Map website and putting additional sites on the map.

My views on architecture before this Connecting Experience were quite disciplinary. I saw it as its own category – something focused solely on constructing the spines of buildings and decorating them

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in styles that appealed to people and could influence human behavior. In my beginning years of college, I worried architecture lacked an aspect of “bettering the world,” something I crave in my life and find crucial for the foundation of my future career. I could not have been more wrong. This research experience showed me how interdisciplinary architecture and our world is. Everything is connected in a web of complexity, discovery, collaboration, and fascination. The BDP program imitates this natural woven fabric of the world and the quilt of the field of architecture. Participating in research on the AE World Map team miniaturized the inner workings of our interdisciplinary society. AE World Map exposed to me that the future architecture relies on sustainability and “green” practices. We cannot continue on building in an ignorant fashion. It revealed to me how digital design of websites is crucial to communicating ideas, mirroring architecture as it communicates ideas to its users. AE World Map was, in a way, the thread that connected all of my thoughts and passions.

Before this Connecting Experience I had taken courses in several related areas – from architecture, to human health, to sustainability and the environment, to modernism in American design. I held deep passions in these areas and saw a career that in some way would connect them through my creative and artistic sides. This research opportunity served as a connecting source between all of these facets. Now apparent to me is that these passions are knotted tightly to the future. When I see the future through my Modernism in American Design class, I see a future that *needs* buildings and products that will sustain the earth. I see structures that deconstruct the needs of human society and support surrounding natural environments. In my Human Health and the Environment class, I look at the future through a lens of recreating healthy lives from the sources of production. I see iteration and creation in our society as well as reevaluation in how we approach this life. Looking through my Regenerative Architecture course, I view a future based on “living buildings” – buildings that are systems on their own and imitate the life of nature. AE World Map allowed me to build on these ideas of the future, understanding that I must focus my career on this shift in thought. I must lead a life that pushes society to open eyes to all the things earth gives us and what we can give to it in return.

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AE World Map has planted many seeds of inspiration and ideas in my mind. I have encountered numerous innovative techniques from architects across the world. I have studied libraries, wellness centers, churches, greenhouses, office buildings, banks, and public parks. I have seen the simplicity of rural India, the modern ways of China, the local construction in Kenya, the intricacy of Japan, and the technology of small-town Texas. I have learned about green roofs and urban farms, weaving vegetation into daily lives. I have researched zero net energy and net positive energy buildings, where structures include water treatment and waste treatment systems into the core. I have read about reconstructible buildings, retractable roofs, and photovoltaic panels. I have seen some of the creative features that make a building *regenerative*. This idea of regeneration in architecture is something I see crucial to the future. We must start to construct buildings that do not just sustain the environment. Buildings must become net positive in terms of energy, giving back to the environments that they have disrupted.

Working on this research team has been an amazing opportunity and I owe all of my growth to Professor Brooks. Without him taking me on as a member and exposing me to the world I did not know I needed, I would not have learned so much about myself and what I strive for in my future. This experience has taught me about my weaknesses. I lack a great deal of knowledge in the technical side of architecture. But my passion has only deepened through this experience, amplifying the craving I have for entering a Masters of Architecture program. The AE World Map team also taught me that I enjoy researching other people's innovative ideas and theories. I find this extremely important in the professional world. If people cannot listen to others, collaborate, and communicate, then there are rigid limits on the human mind. Architecture is a field in which these skills are fundamental. This experience taught me how to be part of a team – fostering new ways of communicating and learning from others. This Connecting Experience also showed me the extent to which I care about architecture beyond its aesthetic appearance. I care deeply about the human touch on the earth and I want to lay a path in which my career strives for a regenerative mindset.