DEA 2500/6600:
The Environment & Social Behavior

This is a course about architecture, design, and human behavior. Students examine how the interaction between social and personal factors and the physical environment affects human health and well-being, interpersonal relationships, and performance. Students collaborate with a design studio and a community client to complete projects.

What do you think is the added value of community engagement?

“I’ve had students say that they felt like there was a lot more on the line. They definitely felt pressure to deliver a good product. I’ve clearly gotten the sense over the years that students in fact feel more motivated. They say and show that in a lot of ways. That’s really what I think the added value is. It’d be like you were writing a paper for a class versus writing a paper for a class where someone’s going to read that paper and talk about it in a decision-making context in the real world: in a business, in the government, whatever. I think you’d be a lot more motivated to really go for it—to make sure you’re accurate, do a good job, that kind of stuff. That’s what I think really comes from it. It’s just so motivating. When the students saw the models and the children playing with them or when they saw college students go and meditate in their space, it’s incredibly rewarding because it’s something that you had some input into.”

What would you tell other faculty about service-learning?

“What I would tell them is that it probably takes more work for the faculty member up front. This class is offered in the fall and we start planning it in May and June. We work pretty regularly throughout the summer because we have to line up all these experts coming in and all the field sites. That’s a lot of work up front. One the other hand, I would say that during the semester, it’s actually a little less work—primarily because the students are so motivated. There are literally never any issues about people not showing up or not doing something on time because, again, it’s not just for me. If they screw up they screw up the design studio that’s waiting for them and they screw up the client. It feels a little bit like I’m a conductor of an orchestra. So I think if you train all the musicians really well and they’re really good musicians, then when it happens you’re just making sure everything is going along as it’s supposed to. So during the semester it’s not bad. One thing I would tell faculty is that it’s probably going to take you more work to plan it and orchestrate it, but once that’s in place it more than pays back.”

How do you think it “pays back”?

“Well, I think it’s the kind of learning that sticks. You’ve done research, you’ve talked to other people, you’ve gotten feedback, you’ve revised it, and then you’ve shared it with someone. And you’ve done that a couple times—remember the iterative process. So I don’t think there’s any issue of memorizing or studying. You just sort of do it so much that I think it just becomes part of who you are and you just understand it.”