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Fruits of student, faculty collaborative work on display in Chicago

JANUARY 10, 2005—The collaborative work of six VisCom students, five of whom have since graduated, staff and faculty from various departments at Ohio University and world-renowned architect **Eva Maddox** is on display at the Art Institute of Chicago through April 3, 2005.

Students and staff of Ohio University worked with Maddox to conceptualize her view of the future of architecture as part of an exhibit titled “Chicago Architecture: Ten Visions,” which opened at the Art Institute Nov. 26, 2004.

The collaboration came about when Maddox contacted Assistant Professor **David Matthews, BS ’87, BFA’87,** of the Interior Architecture program in the school of Human and Consumer sciences at Ohio University.

“Eva likes to give back to the community,” explained School of Visual Communication Assistant Professor **Sam Girton,** whom Matthews contacted to identify student to work with Maddox on the vision for her 20-by-20-foot space at the exhibit. “This was her way of getting students involved.”

Maddox, a member of the Interior Design Hall of Fame and founder of Eva Maddox Branded Environments, received the International Women’s Forum’s “Women Who Make A Difference” Award this October.

She wanted to use the Chicago Architecture project to create a future learning environment while exploring Gardiner’s theory of how people learn.

“If you're going to design a space, you need to know how to teach in the space,” said **Eugene Geist,** associate professor of Human and Consumer Sciences, who served as a curriculum consultant for the project.

OHIO students who contributed to the project were **Bryan Duffie,** a senior in the School of Visual Communication, **Nichelle Eilerman,** a senior in the College of Business, **Meghan McClelland, BSVC '04, Christopher McKenzie, BSVC '04, Kasee Stewart, BSVC '04,** and **Eric Taylor, BSVC '04.**

The students designed interactive kiosks to fit with Maddox's model of what a classroom might look like 15 years from now.

"Our new curriculum and architectural environment reflect the shift from the historical one-way delivery of information to a fully immersive interactive environment," Maddox said of the final work in her architect's statement.

"Classrooms haven't changed in 100 years," said Geist. "There are still desks facing the teacher, there are chalkboards in the front. Now, there might be a computer in the room."

Geist's ideas helped to lay the groundwork, and the team researched how different individuals learn differently using Gardiner's model of multiple intelligences, which emphasizes different ways in which students are intelligent.

Girton emphasized that people do not always realize there are different learning styles. For example, visual learners have not always been understood, or acknowledged in education, which often favors "read-write-math" learners.

"There's a place for everybody, we need to identify where their skill set is," Girton explained. "Educators need to understand everyone's gifts. Everyone has a place and a value in our culture."

With that in mind, the students set to work.

McClelland explained that before you design a classroom, you have to think "How will it be? We got really deep and wondered, how will people be taught in the future? What will education be like? We did a lot of research."

The research included observing how students from East Elementary School in Athens interacted in the environments the Ohio University team was preparing for the Chicago Architecture project, McClelland said.

McClelland, an interactive multimedia major, found out about the project through a class with Girton, where the students brainstormed for the project. She volunteered to become more involved and worked on it the rest of the school year with the team.

The students received academic credit for their endeavors, and the workload “was about five hours a week Winter Quarter, but the work increased exponentially, and by Spring Quarter, we were working five hours a day,” McClelland explained.

The students’ hard work paid off. “The digital piece really fit in,” McClelland said.

When she saw the completed project at the Art Institute for the first time, she said it seemed as though their exhibit encompassed “a lot more research” than the other exhibits.

“My role was more of a project manager, but we all helped with production too,” McClelland said.

“At that point in my senior year, I was thinking about switching my focus to project management, and this helped me realize I wanted to do it.” She now works in the field.

McClelland said it was great to have something outside of school to put on her resume, and that Maddox was eager to help the students to network and explore career opportunities in Chicago.

“It was a fantastic experience and a great networking opportunity.”

Duffie, who was the only junior VisCom student working on the project, put the finishing touches on it this fall before its November opening at the Art Institute. He has not seen it yet, but hopes to make a trip to Chicago next month.

With more than a year of work, the Chicago Architecture project went well beyond the length of any regular school assignment. Duffie said he liked “seeing how a team works with a long-term project.”

Fellow collaborator Taylor emphasized that “it was cool to work with a well-known architecture firm.” Even though Maddox’s firm and the Ohio University team were separated by distance, conference calls and e-mails kept the two groups in touch.

“The distance was a bit of a challenge,” Duffie said. “But it gave us a lot of flexibility to not have someone over our shoulder the whole time, to work on our own.”

“The final outcome is impressive. It was a great experience. I was glad to be a part of it,” Taylor said, pointing out that it also “helped a lot in experiencing what it is to be a team, and how each person has a role.”

Stewart, who did a lot of the videotaping and photographing with the East Elementary School students, said one thing the project taught her was how to work effectively with a team. “It gave me a sense of working with a large group over a long period of time.”

She was among those who attended the opening in December. “It was nice to see what we created. There were weeks when we weren’t sure where we were going with the project, but it turned out great,” Stewart explained. “I’m proud of what we accomplished.”

Girton was also impressed with the finished product, and credits Maddox for getting those at Ohio University involved in the innovative project.

“I really applaud Eva Maddox for this,” he said.

In her architect’s statement, Maddox explained, “The architecture of the Future Learning Environment will be nimble and transparent to support the continual integration of new technology and equipment and provide our children with the inspiration, skills, and means to succeed in a knowledge-based, global economy.”

More information, including photos, can be found on the Chicago Art Institute’s Web site.

-Sarah Kennedy