

College of Architecture and Planning

# THE AURARIA ENGAGEMENT STATIONS

**A DESIGN-BUILD PROJECT FOR  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

CU Denver, May Semester, 2022







(Denver Public Library, Western History/Genealogy Department)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge and honor that the land currently known as Auraria Campus *“is on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Nations. This area was also the site of trade, hunting, gathering, and healing for many other Native Nations: The Lakota, Ute, Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Shoshone, and others. We recognize the Indigenous peoples as the original stewards of the land, water, plants, and animals who called this place home. As these words of acknowledgment are spoken and heard, the ties that these nations have to their traditional homelands are renewed and reaffirmed. Let us also acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal. We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land on which we gather. We pay our respect to them and give thanks to all Tribal Nations and the ancestors of this place. We also want to recognize the community and families of Auraria who lived, worked, and worshipped at Auraria. The decision to provide this sacred land in order to create a permanent home for Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and University of Colorado Denver was a difficult one. Let us honor the families of Auraria and their generous contribution, which made this public campus of higher education possible to benefit so many.”*





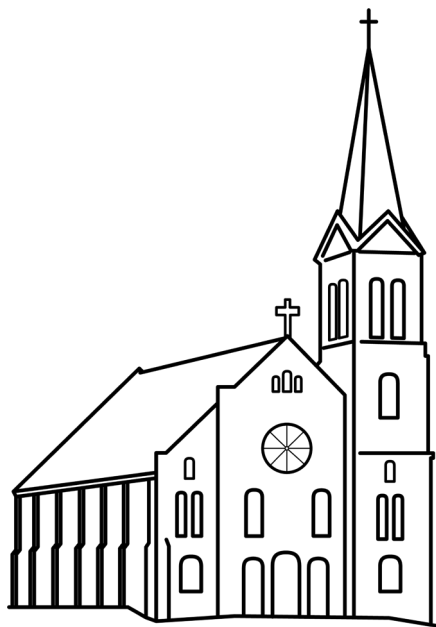
## INTRODUCTION

This book documents the content and context of a 4-week intensive May semester design-build course taught in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver in 2022. It records the work of twelve undergraduate architecture students and their collaborative effort to design and build a physical tool for community engagement.

The pedagogical purpose of the course is twofold: 1) to provide students an opportunity to creatively design and build a project at full scale and, 2) to demonstrate how an interactive tool can engage people on difficult topics, stimulate constructive conversations, and inspire collective imagination for the future.

Students are our future, what they learn and *how they learn to listen and work with communities* is critical to the social and cultural fabrics of our neighborhoods and our cities. This type of pedagogy—one that advocates for social justice and human dignity—belongs in the scholarly continuum of

Design Justice. It is an attempt to instill in students the significance of their role as designers of the built environment and to cultivate in them a sense of social responsibility.



St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church

## DESIGN & COMMUNITY

The students set their goals during the first week: To engage a diversity of people in the past, present, and future of the Auraria Campus by developing a participatory toolkit to explore the social and cultural histories of Auraria and to ignite imagination of what the campus might become. Inspired by the vision of UC Denver Chancellor Marks of “embarking on an initiative to preserve and renovate historic homes along Ninth Street in partnership with AHEC and our community, to continue honoring the people and communities who came before us”, the toolkit was conceived to be spatial, mobile, and interactive; it would be a tool to gather missing stories, collect memories, and aspirations for what Auraria can be.

What ensued following a week of intense research about the history of Auraria, displacement, and campus development was precedent study, design, and construction of mobile interactive “wagons”, ~*engagement stations*. The Engagement Stations serve as a physical tool to encourage participation in the past, present,

and future of Auraria. Often this type of interactive tool is developed for participatory action research (PAR) design. The purpose is to stimulate dialogue about difficult topics, develop empathy through shared stories, and foster an exchange of ideas with an open mind, open heart, and a will to work compassionately toward a collective vision.

We acknowledge that what we know about the history of Auraria is limited at best; we acknowledge that the information we’ve gathered is incomplete and tells only a partial story of the people who lived there and sacrificed so much for the Auraria campus to be built. We take full responsibility for our limited understanding and hope that through listening and learning from those directly impacted by the past and present, we can help decolonize history and better understand how to work toward mutual benefit and common goals. We aim to build on the foundation Chancellor Marks observed...

*“We have already seen the power that collective engagement yields...”*

Michelle Marks, UC Denver Chancellor, 17th of May 2022



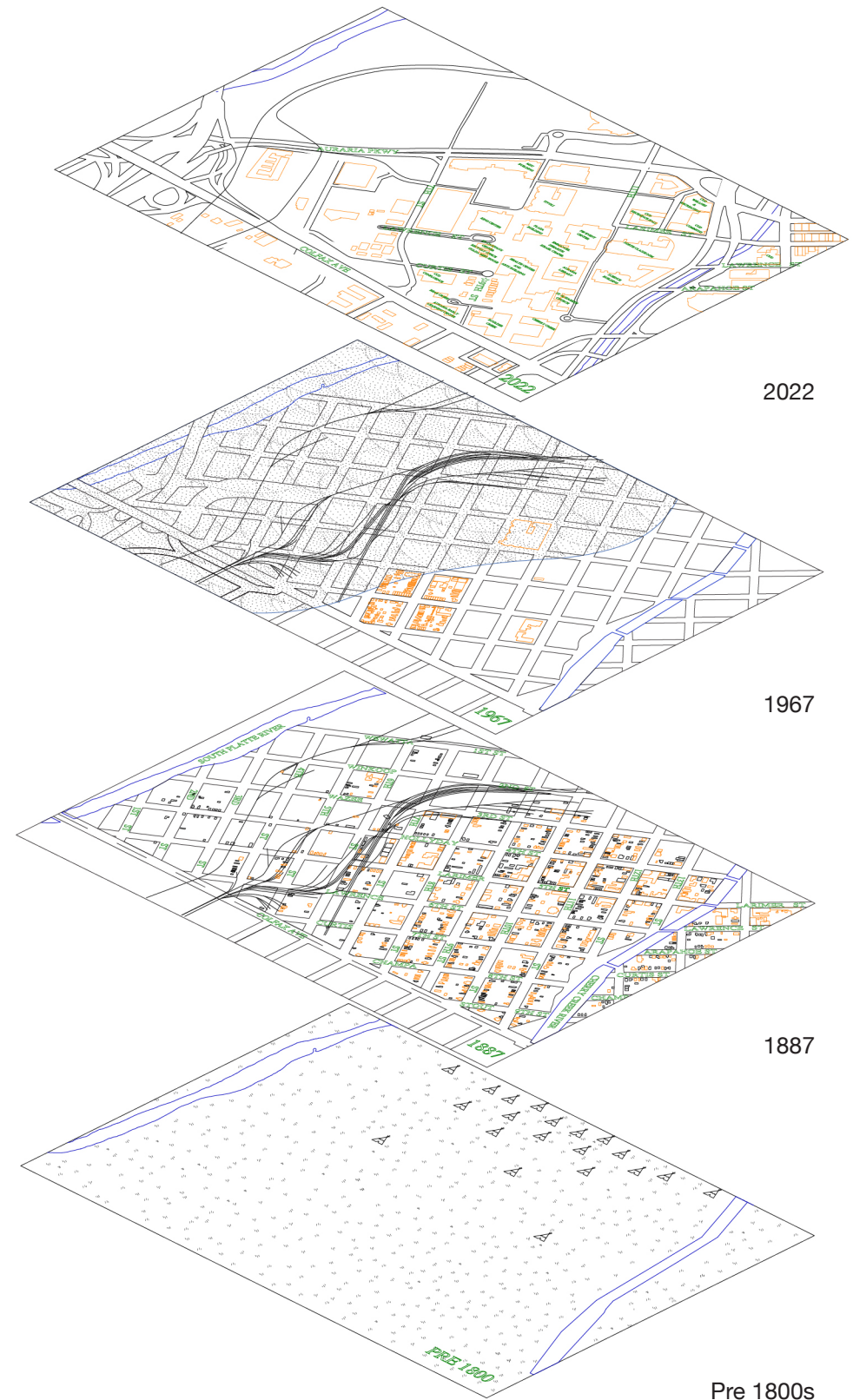


# HISTORY & CONTEXT

Auraria, a campus of almost 40,000 students and three distinct higher education institutions was once open prairie, used by multiple Native American tribes. The land at the convergence of the South Platt River and Cherry Creek later became a vibrant and diverse community of Denver that faced floods, displacement, and eventually erasure. From the 1860's through the early 1900's, Auraria was a community of diverse immigrants because it was a good neighborhood to raise a family and build a business. The location was convenient to downtown Denver, and numerous houses of worship served different religious denominations. In the late 1800's the first neighborhoods outside of Denver were developed and wealthy residents moved out of Auraria. This in turn reduced the property value within Auraria, and so became the destination of poor migrants as well as a rent-majority neighborhood.

The US Congress act of 1949 created the framework for the nation to pursue Urban Renewal through the 1950's and 1960's. A neighborhood full of poor and working class could be labeled "blighted" and allow the use of eminent domain to take away the ownership of property, clearing the way for new development. In 1956, zoning for Auraria was changed to prohibit all new construction. When the city looked for land to locate a new educational campus, Auraria was the cheapest property because the laws had prevented new construction and redlining restricted the poorest population to specific neighborhood. Although Auraria was deemed "blighted" by DURA (Denver Urban Renewal Authority), residents didn't feel that way about their neighborhood.

The flood of 1965 presented an opportunity for DURA to relocate residents instead of repairing and improving the area. In 1968, the plans for the new campus at Auraria was announced, which was the first time most residents heard of redevelopment plans. A bond to fund the redevelopment passed in November, 1969, with 51% of the vote. Although activist groups came together to fight the displacement, they were not successful in resisting the plans. By 1972 the relocation process was complete and demolition of the site completed by 1973. The structures that were saved from demolition include: St Elizabeth's which continues to operate as an active parish, St. Cajetan's which was decommissioned as a functioning church, but continues as an event space for campus use, Emmanuel Shearith Israel Chapel which was decommissioned as a synagogue and now functions as an art gallery for the campus, Tivoli Brewery which now houses the student union, bookstore and other student services, and finally a one block stretch of homes on 9th street between Curtis and Champa which currently houses various offices for the 4 institutions: Metro State University, CU Denver, Community College of Denver and Auraria Higher Education Council.







1900

At the turn of the century, Auraria is a diverse and bustling neighborhood after being settled by German and Irish immigrants.

1828

Gold is discovered near Cherry Creek

1920

Hispanic people from various parts of New Mexico, Southern Colorado, and Mexico, move into the Auraria neighborhood, creating a thriving culture of indigenous and Latina/o heritage.

1960

Latino/a/x people have maintained the Auraria neighborhood as their cultural land for more than 3 generations. There are shops, restaurants and homes, cultural centers and museums, schools and churches.

1965

Terrible flooding of the Platte River causes the City of Denver to re-examine the Auraria neighborhood and eventually to scrap it.

1974

A vibrant community is displaced by the Denver Urban Renewal Authority in order to make way for "Economic Development" and the current Auraria Higher Education Campus.

Present

A full ride scholarship for displaced Aurarians and their descendants is expanded to include students of all three higher education institutions on the Auraria Campus.

CU Denver Architecture students and faculty create interactive mobile wagons that investigate the history of Auraria, engage the community, and inspire participants to imagine a brighter, more inclusive future.

"... la gente en el barrio no sabía lo que estaba planeado para ellos hasta que la decisión ya estaba hecho."

"... the people in the neighborhood did not know what was being planned for them until the decision had already been made."

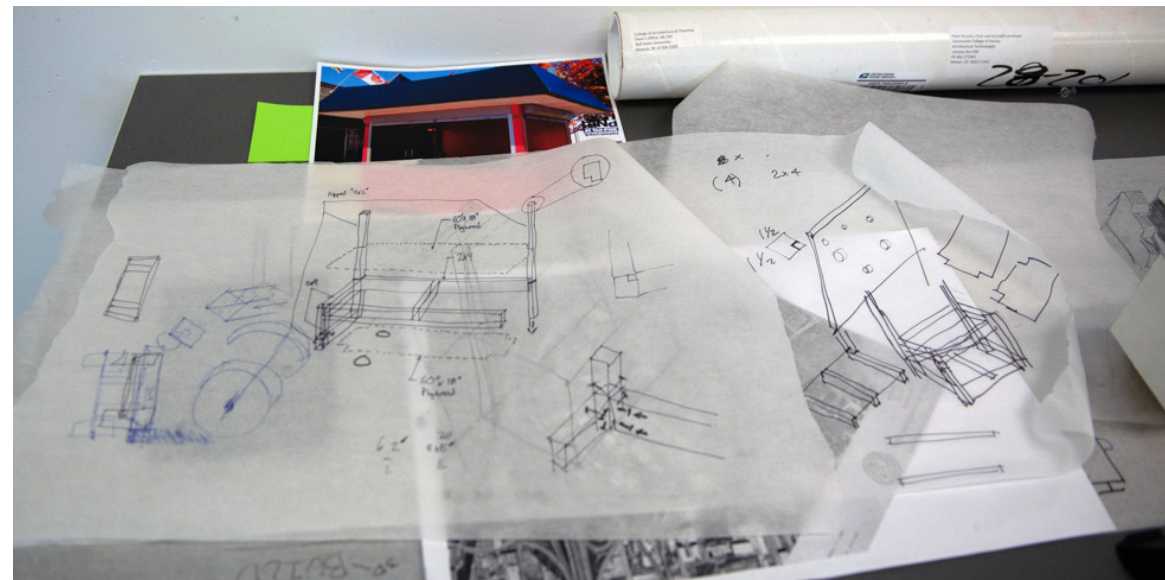
Magdalena Gallegos,  
Decendent of Displaced Aurarians



# PROCESS

In this 4 week May-term course, students were tasked with the creation of an interactive, mobile exhibit of some kind. The short time frame gave students just one week for each phase of the project. They began with research and precedent studies. An initial process of collecting relevant socially conscious and community engaged precedent studies led to sketching, collage making, and developing the design for a movable 'engagement station'. The intention was to use the station as an instrument to spark conversation, collect missing stories, and hear directly from community members about the past and present of Auraria. Students were additionally eager to solicit insight about future development of the campus.

During the second week, students designed and built two mobile wagons. They created a series of different interactive elements including acrylic engraved maps and historic photos laser etched onto wood panels with accompanying text. Postcards of Auraria were designed for distribution. By the end of the third week, students were finally ready to pull the Engagement Station "wagons" into the public sphere for community engagement. During the fourth and final week students created this book to document the class's collective intentions, creative process, learning, and reflections.

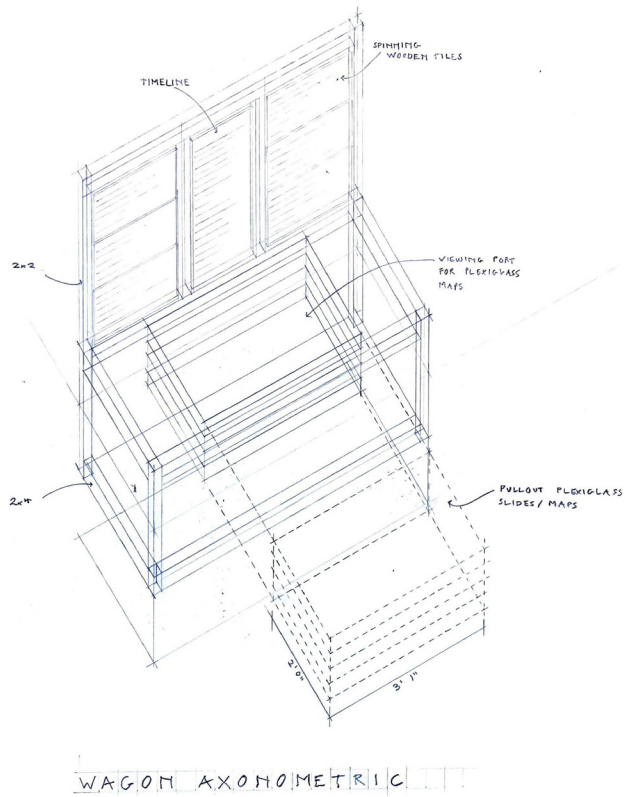
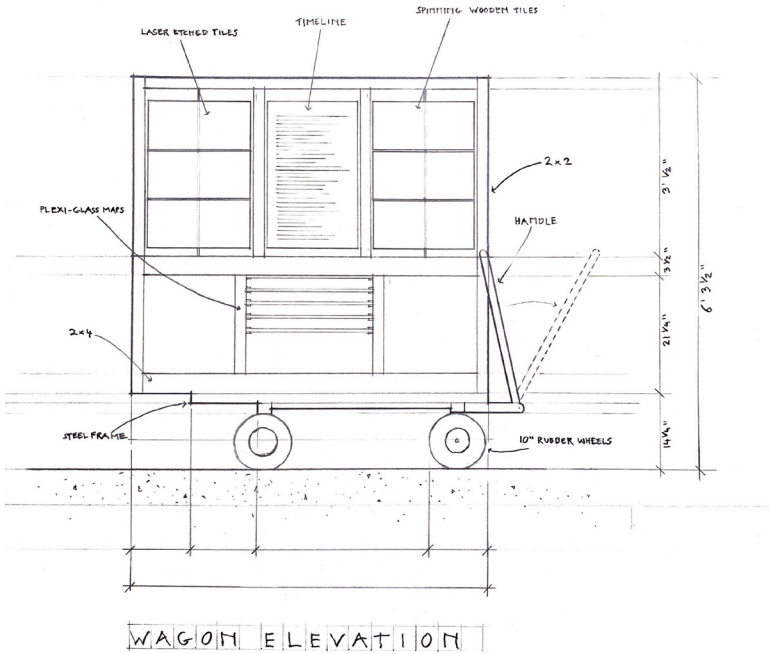








# FINAL DESIGN





# CONCEPT

Conceived as a physical tool, the Engagement Stations aim to encourage conversations about the past, present, and future of Auraria. They aim to cultivate dialogue about difficult topics and foster an exchange of ideas with an open mind and an open heart. These kinds of interactive tools are often developed for participatory design amplifying democratic processes.

An invitation to participate is posted on the Engagement Stations:

*We cordially invite you to interact with these mobile Engagement Stations. What you see here is a partial graphic depiction and timeline of Auraria. We hope you will make the story more complete. Please add your memories, remembrances, and stories of this special place.*

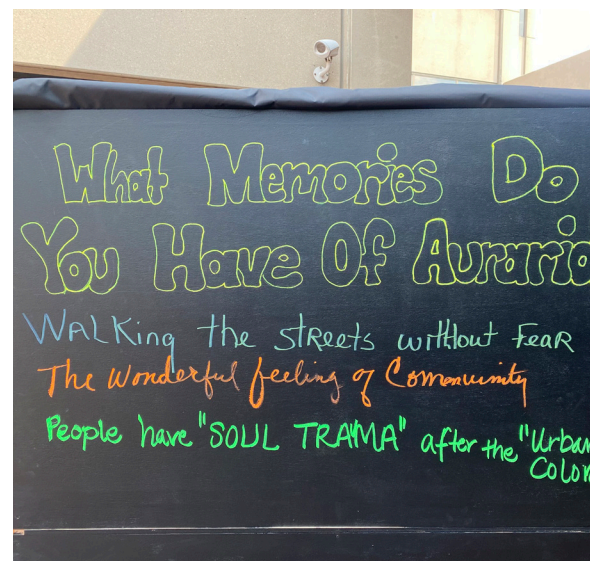
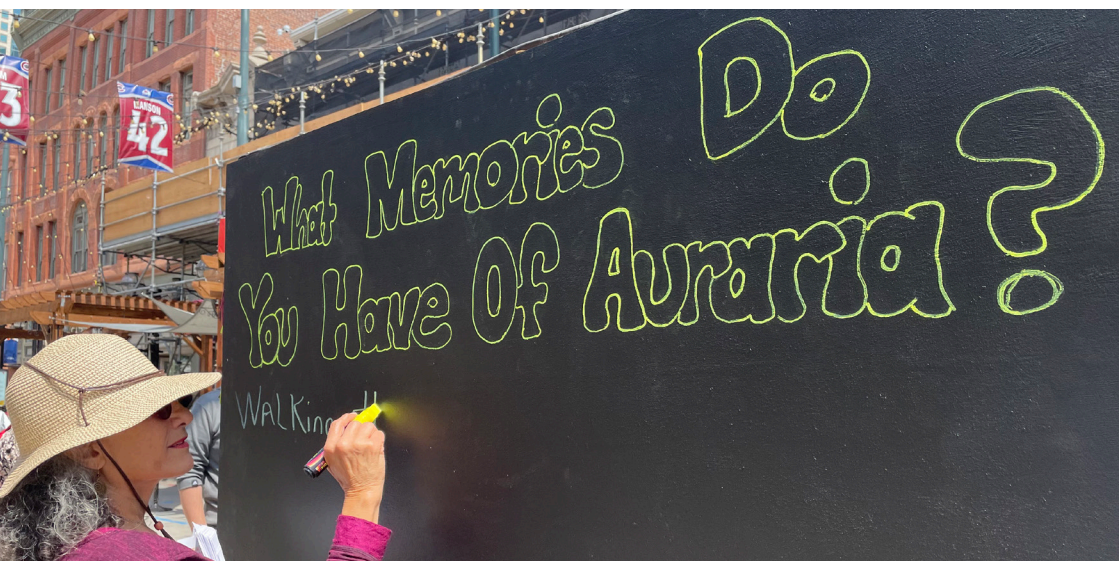
*Many lives have been impacted by Auraria, from the displaced Aurarians and their descendants to current students, faculty, staff and visitors. Please tell us your connection to Auraria. And what the place means to you.*





# ENGAGEMENT...

During the third week of class, the Engagement Stations were wheeled out to several different locations on and near the Auraria campus for public participation and education. Pictured here are scenes from Larimer Square in Denver and the 9th Street Historic Park on the Auraria campus.





# ENGAGEMENT...

At the Tivoli Student Union, 9th Street Historic Park, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church –each on the Auraria campus, we engaged with students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Visitors were encouraged to interact and leave suggestions, memories, and ideas for the future. Student-made postcards of Auraria were offered to visitors as take-aways.





# REFLECTIONS



*This community-engaged design allowed for an opportunity for community engagement and the availability of further connections to many different people. We were allowed to collaborate with various community members and had the chance to share on multiple occasions other forms of leadership. The opportunity to participate in this project allowed for further progression in how we express our design ideas and concepts to the community. This is integral when trying to be successful in our future careers. I believe this project allowed me to understand how to be self-aware of designing with the community in mind. **Riley Wines***

*Throughout my academic career I have really enjoyed any projects that are hands on and this course took it a step further with the community engagement piece. We always have the intent of creating change with design projects but, this course actually managed to begin doing so by having a physical artifact to interact with. I am so proud of what our group has accomplished and I am walking away from this course with a new perspective of Auraria, and needless to say I will definitely be stopping by the 9th Street park throughout my last year at CU Denver and beyond. **Amber Slusser***



*Being a part of this design build class was a great experience to build hands on and interact with new people about the history of a rich culture. Being able to make people aware of things going on in an interactive way was unique and using the laser cutter to produce high quality art is a piece that was very exciting to see. Mobilizing the carts out in the public is a good feeling because it creates a sense of risk taking accomplishment towards the goals that we wanted to achieve. Coming together to produce this design build project was challenging and fun I am glad with what we produced throughout our time together. **Pedro Aguirre***

*Design has the power to foster community engagement and illicit a response. Working on this project allowed us to hear the voices of a diverse array of community members, past and present. Ultimately with the goal in mind of discussing the future of the Auraria campus, and more specifically the 9th street park, with the backdrop of historical context. Sparking conversations, listening, and interacting through design intervention allowed us to shape our understanding of the site and more importantly, the communities associated with it. **Andrew Kauffman***



*Throughout my time at CU Denver, I wanted to be part of a course that allowed us to build something and give back to a community. The community engagement course gave me an opportunity to interact with a community and have a hands-on experience. I learned more about the history of the Auraria campus and about 9th street park. What impacted me the most was hearing all stories of the Auraria neighborhood and how united they once were. The two carts that we designed, and built are so practical because we are able to take them around the city so that more people can be aware of the change that the Auraria neighborhood and families went through. **Karina Valencia-Rodriguez***

*The lens in which we receive our history is crucial to our understanding of our surroundings, it's important to understand that the true story is not a simple google search away. Through our community engagement, we have been able to collect perspectives that were once ignored. Our interactive carts were a tool that provided those curious enough with a deeper understanding of Denver's history, but also taught us the true reality of the displaced Aurarians. I am proud of my classmates for our hard work creating this interactive tool in such a short span of time. This project has shown me the power of community engagement and what it means to design with empathy. **Bailey Scrivens***







*This community-engaged design class gave me the opportunity to learn how to work collaboratively. Our project was also intended to connect the community and encourage participation in the collection of data on the history of Auraria and the future hopes for the 9th street park. The carts we made had the ability to be moved to places where people had the chance to stop by to learn, interact and connect with the history. The tools in the cart also allowed people to express their opinions or leave a record of memories. This class allows us to think collaboratively to present limited information to those in the community to start the conversation. Moving forward I will keep in mind the importance of hearing the voices of the community and having leadership to reach out to them.*

**Monica Cardenas Bernal**



*To create a community engaged design build there must be a small community trying to voice the history or voices not being heard. We were able to collaborate, and all take risks to inform, learn, and memorialize within the community to provide for future generations. Something that started so small became such a big voice for the community. Participating in the community engaged design build, was something that helped redefine how I approach every project I want to design. Community engagement touches everything from history to the environment; it should be the voice of design.*

**Ashtyn Franks**



*The Community Engage Design-Build class gave me the chance to design stations that will go directly to the community where we are completing our education. Working with a large group was the most useful part, it is always fun to see all the people you are working with collaborating and trying to give their best. And I think we got good outcomes in the final result because the whole group worked together. I learned a lot about how we can design a project that will allow people to engage and give them the freedom to add their thoughts.*

**Doaa Al Dires**

*This Community Engaged Design + Build has been a great opportunity to learn not only what it's like to work with a large group of individuals but, also what it's like to work with the community. Designing something that purely functions as a steppingstone for a more meaningful contribution in the future has taught me a lot about what encourages community participation. I find it is always important to learn about the history that is not often talked about or taught. Though this experience has been fast, being able to build something that has already reached many different locations and people throughout the Denver area has been awesome. I hope to be a part of more projects that encourage the architects to work with the community opposed to just for it.*

**Caelin Johnson**



*This project gave us the opportunity as students of architecture and future architects to collaborate as a group with community members, activists, instructors, and historians in order research, conceptualize, design and build something that could affect actual change for students, faculty and residents of Auraria, both past, present and future. The result was a soundly built mobile station that through participation with the community, gathered missing voices, histories and future aspirations for the Auraria campus. I think the project exceeded all our expectations and it was a privilege to create something from scratch and see it blossom into a functional tool for community engagement and growth.*

**Michael Wishart**



*Being able to have the chance to participate in this years community engaged design-build has been an amazing experience. I have had the chance to learn more about the community around me and the people within it while working with other amazing student and faculty. Being able to design something and then actually roll it out and see the interactions it creates has been an amazing experience. Being able to work with such a large group has taught me a lot about teamwork and corporation and I hope to do something like this again in the near future.*

**Troy Drake**





# FACULTY LEADERS



*Teaching this class was an opportunity to return to a hands-on build project with the undergraduate students. There was a hiatus of Design-Build opportunities for undergraduates due to the Covid pandemic, and this course was tangible proof, to me, of hope for the future. Working with Prof. Susan Melsop brought a new set of Learning Outcomes to the course around Community Engagement that enriched the course experience on every level.*

*I am so honored to have had the opportunity to learn from my colleague, my students and every member of the community that engaged with the students' project. The work of teaching students about the impact of Community Engagement and guiding them through the design of a tool to encourage conversation and empathy has a critical place in the pedagogy of training future Designers and Architects.*

**Jo VandenBurg, Instructor, Associate Chair**



*I am honored to have had the experience of serving as a Visiting Associate Professor this past year in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to “teach” community-engaged design in this unique context. Providing students opportunities for direct experience with community members fosters critical consciousness and cultivates a reflective practice of our role and responsibilities as designers of the built environment. I believe expanding the socio-cultural-political practice of architecture education encourages and better prepares students to be agents of change.*

*I am indebted to Jo VandenBurg for her collaborative leadership, collegiality, and great humor throughout this 4-week course. Finally, I thank the students in this class for their open minds, open hearts, and –together pushing the boundaries of what we typically believe architecture education to be. Thank you!*

**Susan Melsop, Visiting Associate Professor,  
2021-2022**

**Associate Professor, Design  
The Ohio State University**





## WHAT WE LEARNED

The statement below eloquently articulates our collective position...

Difficult conversations can strengthen our most important relationships with our community because they create understanding and connection. Through dialogue we gain knowledge. If we cannot initiate a constructive conversation, we fail to learn how to listen and express our needs and wants. Knowledge is only a tiny part of our beliefs, proven by evidence, which changes as we gain more experience. Avoiding complex discussions leads to the development of anger and mistrust, which will inevitably impact how we interact with others. Without resolving conflict through dialogue we will never change as a community and, even more pertinent, as a world.

Developing community engagement designs is integral to the learning process and the first stage of forming a stronger community. We need to be able to work together to develop ideas on how we may remember history correctly and through many voices. A single voice telling the story of history will inevitably direct the narrative into a biased depiction. We live in a world where words are not always followed through with action. Through community-engaged design, we are participating actively, trying to learn, and potentially making an impact on lives that have been silenced through the opinions and actions of others. In this project, we aimed to allow everyone to voice their opinion with our wagon, and we listened and adapted. Our wagon is just a tiny start in making headway in difficult conversations. We all have a voice as a community, and the hardest thing to do is start, and we hope that our design has brought that initiation.

**Riley Wines**



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