The University Village Studio:
Visions for an Intergenerational Community

STEPHEN SCHREIBER, RICHARD NORDHAUS, and
BRIAN PANASITI
University of New Mexico

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, the University of New Mexico Architecture Program offered a unique interdisciplinary studio, which involved thirteen students, three studio faculty members, four local architects, three nationally known urban design professionals, and numerous faculty members from other university departments including law, gerontology, medicine, planning and other disciplines. The participants formed three interdisciplinary teams. Each group worked together on research and analysis exercises, an initial charrette, and continuing development of the master plan. The individual students in each team designed specific architectural projects for their team's master plans. Each individual project addressed a specific set of needs of senior citizens.

GOALS

The concept of the studio grew out of urban design, architectural, social and programmatic needs and opportunities identified by university administrators, faculty and professionals. The spirit of the project focused on the discovery of ways that universities and communities can come together to posit new futures that will enrich the community and engage the university in the changing issues of society. The project presented an opportunity for a School of Architecture and Planning to explore the intersection of two major societal issues — society's attitudes and response to an aging population and the university's role in lifelong learning and discovery.

The project was a demonstration of the power of the classroom environment to function as a laboratory in which students learn by combining creative energy with new knowledge informed by practical realities. It is a form of inquiry in which lessons of critical analysis, technique and craft, creativity and application are rarely forgotten. The project brought together the knowledge of the university with the wisdom and experience of local and national professionals, reinforcing the notion that learning is indeed a lifelong quest.

Computer technology played an important role throughout the project for research, design, and communication. The computer was used to develop a database of information and
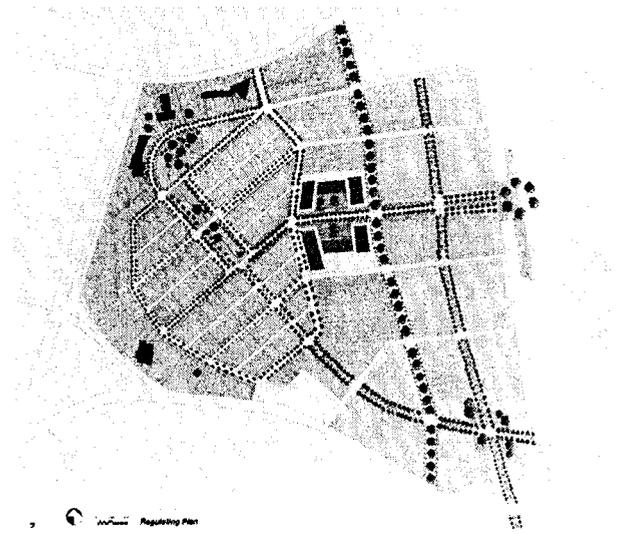

Fig. 1. Team "Void" Master Plan (Faculty: S. Schreiber, AIA. Students: J. Castillo, K. Dobrusky, C. Greenfield, C. Schmieder. Local architect: D. Dekker. Urban design consultant: S. Polyzoides).
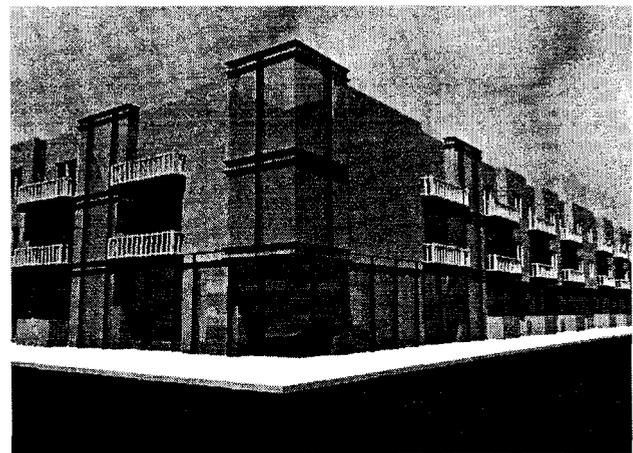

Figure 2. Senior housing project by Jody Castillo (Team Void)—Perspective.
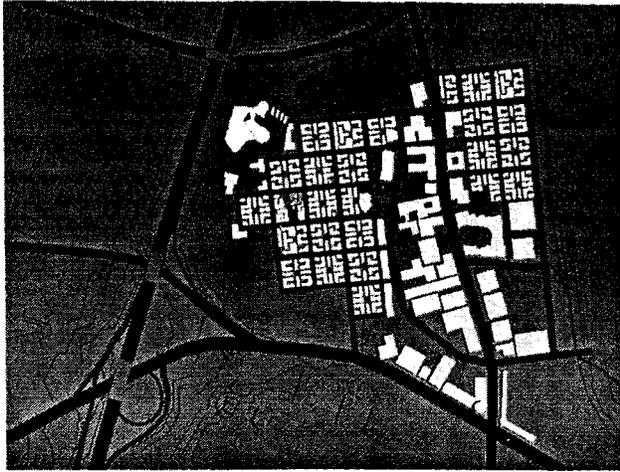
Figure 3. Team "XYZ" Master Plan (Faculty: R. Eribes, AIA. Students: P. Fehlau, S. Mirkhah, G. Nelson Krumm, P.Pollock. Local architects: M. Depree, G. Adams. Urban design consultant: T. McGinty).

case studies — the database was kept on line so teams could call up reference material at any time during the planning and design phases. The computer was particularly useful for the development of three-dimensional models of the site and surrounding area and for providing a matrix for collaboration between participants.

The commitment to team work was also important to the studio. Although most professional design projects utilize design teams in practice, the architecture school studio model emphasizes individual work. While mutual support between students in studios is encouraged and the positive impact of interaction is recognized, projects normally recognize individual talents and skills. While individual growth is essential, collaborative processes often enhance creativity and productivity of work teams. The collaborative approach of the studio exposed students to the difficult issue of balancing personal autonomy with responsibility to the group. The participation of local practitioners, consultants, and client representatives added the pressures and excitement of the real world.

EVALUATION

While the product of the University Village was a set of planning concepts and design ideas for a large piece of university land, the most important result was the process of the studio and the impact it had on the students, faculty, consultants and university clients. From the beginning of the project, the client asked for a vision of the possibilities for the site. The planning and design work and the dialogue that followed has changed the perception of decision makers. What was viewed as a difficult and run down area, is now envisioned as a valuable piece of land with the potential for development as an innovative and vital community.

For the City of Albuquerque, the project would improve a site that is now a mixture of routine, ugly commercial strip and vacant land. The development would consolidate the residen-
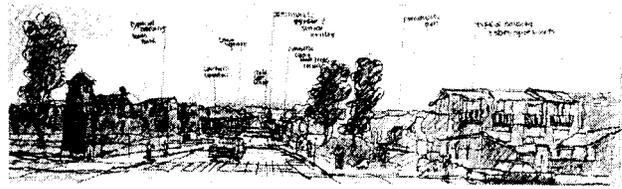

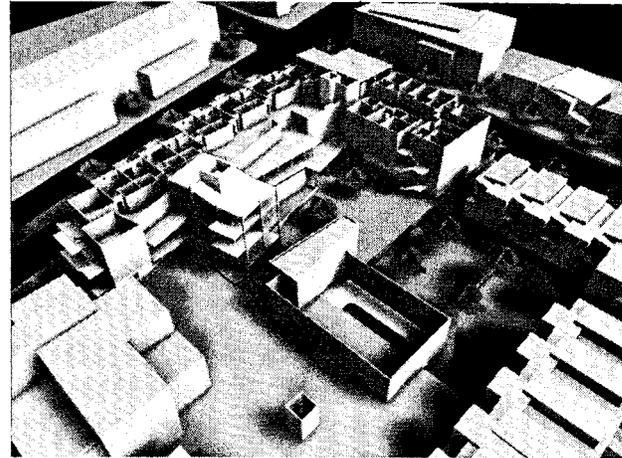Fig. 4. Sketch by Team XYZ from initial charrette.

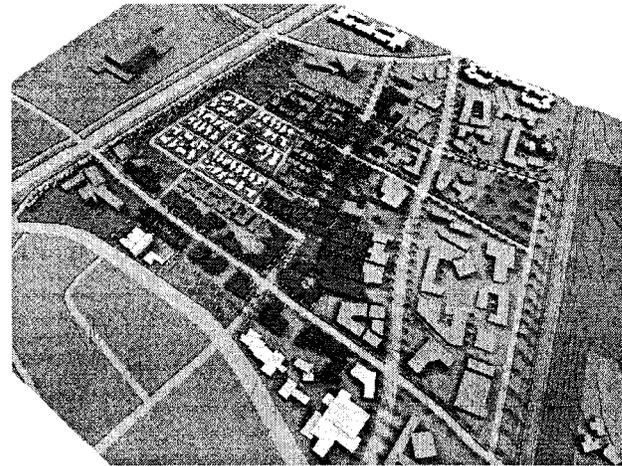Fig. 5. Assisted living/mixed use complex, by Brian Panasiti (Team Rambla)—Axonometric.

Fig. 6. Team "Rambla" Master Plan (Faculty: R. Nordhaus. Students: B. Panasiti, P. Girzone, R. Faucett, D. Gilson, E. Whole. Local architect: G. Smith, AIA. Urban design consultant: the office of Barton Myers).

tial neighborhoods east of downtown and develop fallow land as a taxable resource. The project could support initiatives for improving city development standards, such as landscaping standards for arterial roads, reducing carriage way dimensions, establishing and testing a mixed-use ordinance, displacing zoning with explicit urban and architectural codes, etc. The city would also benefit by observing the advantages of developing compact neighborhoods at its core, as a method of controlling metropolitan growth and sprawl.
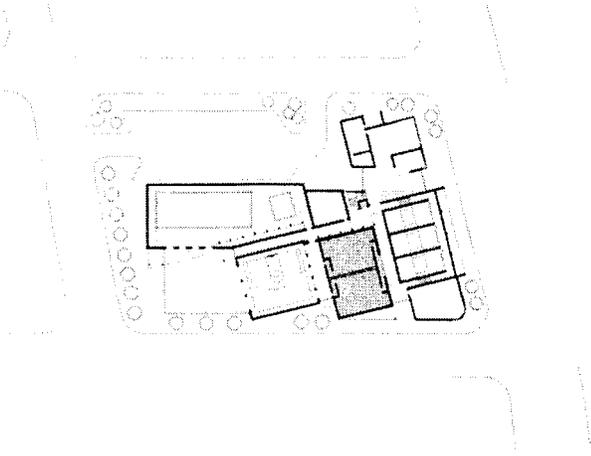
Fig. 7. Senior citizen wellness center, by Peter Girzone (Team Rambla)—Plan

Fig. 8. Senior citizen wellness center, by Peter Girzone (Team Rambla)—Perspective

The university would benefit by developing the northwest quadrant of the campus as a permeable boundary with the new neighborhood. The addition of design control over arterial roads, would result in pedestrian-friendly form for new buildings and in many physical connections between town and gown. Academic and residential university buildings would benefit from their adjacency to the proposed neighborhood center.

The new neighborhood could be designed for a variety of incomes and accommodate a variety of dwelling types, providing options for faculty, staff and students to locate near the university. Aggregate commuting to the campus would be reduced. Alumni could return and live the final years of their lives in a physically and intellectually stimulating environment. The development of this neighborhood, represents an important financial opportunity for the university.

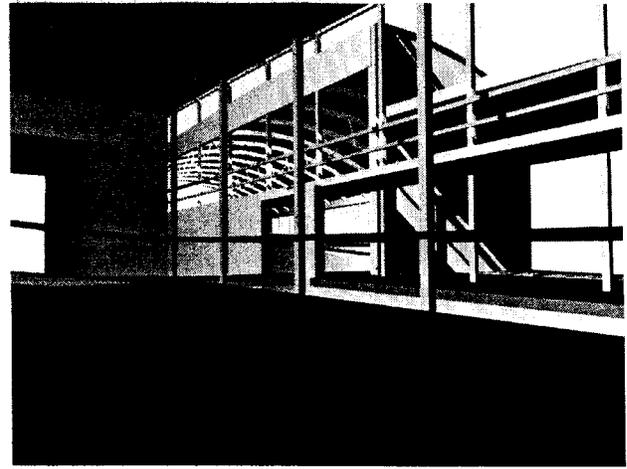This project would best serve the interests of an elderly population. A pedestrian environment organized around a continuous and beautiful realm of public space would allow them to take care of their shopping needs unassisted. Access to parks would enhance their recreational possibilities. Access to families and children, would enhance their social life. Access to the university would provide opportunities for life long learning. Access to downtown through shuttles and transit would expose them to a full array of metropolitan activities. The neighborhood strategy integrates an aging population into safe and stimulating surroundings, offering options that enrich their daily lives, allowing them to remain engaged with their families and with their culture.

NOTE

The work from this studio was published in the 1997 book; "The University Village – Visions for an Integenerational Community." The 75-page illustrated publication is available for $20 from the University of New Mexico, Architecture Program, 2414 Central Ave., SE, Albuquerque, NM 87131, Attn.: Stephen Schreiber.