

Learning from the Cube

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A student of architecture can learn many things from a design-build project. First and most obvious, it leads to an understanding of the many things it takes to make a building - from how to use a specific tool, the sequencing of construction to sourcing materials. All of these areas are hugely important to the education of an architect and there is no better way to learn them than through actual doing. But even more important than these lessons, a design-build project forces a student to develop a way of working to address the multifarious characteristics of a project; that is a student must develop an approach to the practice of architecture. A typical studio project can only bring this development along so far. A student may skirt around the edges of a project they are unsure about, focusing only on the parts they find 'comfortable.' Because a design-build project must be built, a student cannot ignore certain aspects of the project. It forces the student out of their comfort zone to confront all facets of a project, learn on the fly, and think on their feet.

Vincent van Gogh said of his painting, 'I long so much to make beautiful things...but beautiful things require effort - and disappointment and perseverance.' This sentiment is the most important thing a design-build project can teach. It instills a belief in yourself - that if you attack a project with all your spirit and a willingness to fail and learn from those failures, you can make beautiful things.

It is in this spirit that the 'cube' project is offered as a way to situate and support design-build as an important and viable component within the education of the architect. A student-led design-build project, the cube, stands 13'8" x 13'8" x 13'8", encloses a 96 sq. ft. room, and is composed of three cast-in-place concrete walls. It evolved over a period of 4 years, involved over 30 students, 3 faculty members, and culminated as a student's master's thesis. The cube's intent was not so much about the completion of a 'project' as it was to provide a place and opportunity for students to be immersed into the constructive nature of architecture; to inhabit their work through the construction site.

