• Paper / Proposal Title:
Collaborative Thinking through the Dynamics of Site and Architecture in Design Education

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• Abstract (300 words):
Designing for a complex world requires architects to think critically, creatively, and collaboratively. To support the development of this skillset, the atmosphere of the design studio in architectural education challenges students to develop ideas creatively and critically reflect upon their conceptual designs for given projects. In design education, thinking collaboratively does not need to be solely defined by the sharing of ideas and information among peers, but instead can be applied to how architecture and its site can collectively inform one another throughout the design process to achieve a desired solution.

Often, students are taught to sequentially operate within the design process by observing, recording, and then responding to it conditions with an architectural intervention. This procedure, while beneficial in teaching students to acknowledge and appreciate the contextual environment for their design, can be misguided as it emphasizes the site as a given, invariable constraint that is static and impermeable in nature. Architectural design involves a mediation of the designer’s intentions with the
site. As such, students should be encouraged to consider architecture and the conditions of the site as malleable, accommodating bodies.

This paper will present a series of projects, introduced to students in their second-year of study, that encouraged students to break the sequence of observe, record, and respond to allow site and architecture to be responsively in dialogue with one another throughout the design process. At the outset of each project, students were asked to blur the demarcations of architecture and site, among the earth and beyond to the sky, towards discovering ways in which the architecture and its contextual surroundings might respect, respond, and support one another to cultivate a desired user experience. These exercises offered students an avenue to creatively and critically maneuver the design process while promoting collaborative thinking between architecture and its environment.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Sean Burns is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Ball State University specializing in architectural design and structural principles and analysis. Sean holds a professional Bachelor of Architecture degree from Kent State University and a post-professional Master of Architecture degree, with specialization in Design and Theory, from the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to joining the faculty at Ball State, Sean worked for various architectural firms including Rafael Viñoly Architects and FXCollaborative as a registered architect and LEED BD+C Accredited Professional.

While his teaching focuses primarily on foundations of design and beginner architectural education within the undergraduate architectural curriculum at Ball State University. Sean has also taught graduate level design-build workshops and studios. These graduate level courses have resulted in the design, fabrication, and erection of multiple permanent installations along the existing trail system near Morrow’s Meadows in Yorktown, Indiana.

Sean’s current research concentrates on how architecture and structural behaviors and performances can inform one another within the design process. This research is grounded in the writings and lessons of architectural theorists and other allied disciplines, and applied through the methodological approaches to design as evident in his courses.