Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Project Based Experiential Learning Design Environment for a K-12 Museum

• Author(s) Name:
Abimbola O. Asojo and Hoa Vo

• University or Company Affiliation:
University of Minnesota

• Abstract (300 words):
Providing interior design students authentic experiences is one primary goal of interior design education. This led the authors to incorporate project based experiential learning in a seven-week studio course in the Interior design program at a land-grant Midwest university. 32 sophomores were engaged in different stages of the process while designing the education wing of Minnesota’s official natural history museum in collaboration with Perkins+ Will, a global architecture and design firm. Students designed the South education wing of the first level of the building taking into consideration the fixed elements such as the shell, structure, and vertical circulation. This South education wing included the K-12 education area and hands-on exhibition.

Students explored design problem-solving using theoretical approaches and had the unique opportunity to interact with stakeholders and practitioners who participated in the creation of the Museum. Conversations with the involved parties helped the students
gain insights about the design-challenge plus the pros and cons of their solutions. For seven weeks, in teams of three, students immersed themselves in a diverse real working environment. They learned how to communicate, collaborate, and compromise to accomplish a common goal of finding the most relevant design solution for the challenge at hand.

The authors collected students’ reflections about their experiences at the end the project. The new Bell Museum personnel, Perkins + Will representatives and the instructors were pleased with the in-depth research and design solutions of the student teams. Through the teams’ reflections of their design solutions and process, they expressed ample understanding of the site, the existing building, constructional structures, the community, and target audience (K-12 students). The common themes that emerged from the teams were sense of place, connection to nature, sustainability, universal design, and interactive technology. This presentation discusses findings from this project based experiential learning design.

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

Abimbola Asojo is a Professor in the Interior Design program at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on cross-cultural design issues, African architecture, computing and design, architectural lighting design, and sustainable post-occupancy evaluation.

Hoa Vo is a Ph.D. student in Interior Design at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on the notion of creativity, feedback as a tool to elevate creativity in design educational and professional contexts, and human behaviors in the built environment.