

The Immigration Station: Designing for Dignity at the U.S./Mexico Border

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Publication Date

21-12-2023

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Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Colella, C. (2020). *The Immigration Station: Designing for Dignity at the U.S./Mexico Border* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24884847.v1>

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Library Research Award Application Essay
Category: Senior Thesis Level

The Journey to the Immigration Station: Using the Hesburgh Libraries to Design for Dignity

Excited to take on thesis as a result of watching upperclassmen reviews for years and formed deeply by my academic and personal experience here at the University of Notre Dame, I knew that I wanted to spend my final year of architecture school completing a project that would be interdisciplinary and representative of all I had learned at Notre Dame – inside and outside of the School of Architecture. Ultimately, I completed “*The Immigration Station: Designing for Dignity at the U.S. Mexico Border*” a proposal for the design of an immigration station and immigrant services campus located on a strip of the United States/Mexico border in El Paso, Texas. The station was designed using the traditional design principles we learn here at Notre Dame and employs Catholic Social Teaching as a crucial part of the design guidelines. This thesis was an exploration of the use of architecture as a tool for the promotion of human dignity. It all began in the library.

At first my research had nothing to do with architecture but instead focused on Catholic Social Tradition and the immigration issue. Having studied on the 12th floor of the library to for what seemed like countless Structures and Building Technology exams, I knew that’s where I would find books on C.S.T.. Once I had strengthened my broad understanding, I consulted the Hesburgh librarians for recommendations to center my C.S.T. research to the encyclicals addressing the immigration crisis in the Americas. It was through reading one recommendation in particular: *Catholic Social Teaching in Global Perspective* by Daniel MacDonald, S.J., that I was able form the grounding of my argument - one can and should use C.S.T. as a basis for design, especially when designing for the most vulnerable.

Over fall break I had the incredible opportunity to travel to El Paso, Texas to document the conditions of my proposed site as well as spend time learning from the people of the community made possible by a grant received from the School of Architecture. Through conversations with librarians, recommendations with professors, and utilization of OneSearch and interlibrary loan, I was able to gather all the information I needed ahead of my trip including access to periodicals and published papers on related research, maps of the area, and additionally

took out a few documentary DVDs, our own Fr. Dan Groody's *Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey* and *One Border, One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist*, from the library's basement video collection. The library resources I consulted were crucial in preparing me for my trip and in formulating my own Catholic perspective on immigration in our nation.

With the start of the spring semester came time to work on the building design. I immediately sought out our Architecture Librarian, Jennifer Parker. Jennifer helped me optimize our library resources as I searched for architectural precedent. We found resources on American civic architecture and designing for democracy and looked into civic Latin America. This fusion of precedents enabled me to create a welcoming, rather than intimidating, experience for migrants as well as a celebration of the process – allowing those who work at the station and those it serves to have a dignified experience. I worked with Jennifer to find books in our collections and any book I found that we did not already have she was able to acquire for our library. Countless hours were spent flipping through books and sketching ideas in Walsh Family Hall Architecture Library.

It was through my research in the Architecture library that I was able to determine additional travel research was needed to determine the aesthetics of the building. Due to the generosity of the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture, I gained the once-in-a-lifetime experience of traveling to Chiapas, Mexico. Chiapas proved to be the perfect place to conduct my final research trip. I would never have known it was the place to go without the time spent in the Architecture Library looking at *Architecture and Urbanism in Colonial Chiapas, Mexico* by David Sidney, one of the many books Jennifer and I found together.

The other two invaluable members of our Architecture Library team, Adam Heet and Morgan Wilson, helped me when it came to the 3D representation of my designs. With their help I gained knowledge in SketchUp and was able to build computer model of my site as well as the buildings on the campus. While I used the digital model to understand the spatial relationships I was aiming to create, Morgan was able to take my file and use the 3D printers in our Architecture Library Makerspace to print my designs for a physical model I built by hand. With our Architecture Library Team's help, I convinced guest reviewers at midterm of my design proposal and improved my designs for the final presentation. Due to Coronavirus, I was not able to print the updated final model for my thesis review. However, thanks to Adam and Morgan's

guidance, I have the digital file and cannot wait to finish my model when I return to campus to visit!

As Coronavirus hit mid-thesis semester, it proved particularly challenging to navigate completing our design projects at home rather than in our Walsh Family Hall studios. The Architecture Library team made sure we had every possible resource as we attempted to complete our projects including adding to our database collection and, of course, we had access to our beloved digitized rare books collection. Ultimately, I believe it was my prior and continued utilization of library resources throughout the thesis semester in Hesburgh, in the Architecture Library, and at home with books and 3D programs, that contributed most significantly to the success of the final drawings for my thesis project. I am grateful to our Architecture Library team for teaching me how to use our varied library resources at the very beginning of my education as they proved invaluable in the completion of this project – and more importantly, in helping me get the most out of my Notre Dame education.

Photographic Appendix:

Images are provided to illustrate the design process and utilization of varied library materials. Please see project file document for final presentation drawings.



[studio desk at the beginning of the design process utilizing printed images from the Architecture Library's Digitized Rare Books Catalogue]



[midterm review presentation drawings and process hybrid model – base built by hand and proposed buildings printed in the Architecture Library's 3D Makerspace]



[shelf of library materials saved for continued use even after Coronavirus hit]



[views of Sketchup 3D digital model used as design tool]