‘The First Conversation’: working with micro-businesses and learning how to approach a real design project

In this seminar/workshop, students will work with real clients who are in need of design services but don't otherwise have access to them

Design Workshop for Small Businesses
Design needs to be accessible for everyone. This includes all people as well as their new businesses: businesses of all scales and income levels. Unfortunately, small, new businesses typically don’t have the resources to engage the design community. Through a series of discussions with Mercy Corps Northwest’s (MCNW) small business clients, UO architecture students examined how small businesses would benefit from the skills and knowledge of
designers. The business owners revealed how they typically don’t have the time or resources to grow their business into new space, while simultaneously operating their business. This seminar/workshop represents an opportunity for architecture students to build a program that engages with these business owners and helps them develop a design vision.

This seminar/workshop provides a platform for students to work with small business owners. Through the partnership with our neighbors MercyCorps NorthWest, teams of students will be paired with small business owners who are currently facing spatial design and building issues. The student teams are tasked with:

1. building the relationship with the client
2. identifying potential design solutions, and
3. communicating their vision to the client in a successful and valuable way.

Through the seminar/workshop, students will learn valuable skills, working with volunteers from the local professional community, while providing important pro-bono services to micro-entrepreneurs.

The workshop will be based on real projects that will be taken on by small groups of students. The project work with clients will be aided by a series of discussions and collaborations among students, clients and architectural professionals. Each week we will dissect a component of an ongoing project and charrette around that issue. An architectural professional from one of various local firms will join us in that discussion and provide his or her knowledge to the issue at hand. The idea is to simulate office like discussions. Issues ranging from spatial layouts to code issues will be covered. Throughout the term each student team will develop a project binder that communicates their findings of the class to the client at the end of the term.

This workshop focuses on the beginning phases of a design process: specifically the ‘Pre Design Phase’. It’s the opportunity to identify the client’s design issues and explain how the design process will benefit their business. Clients may inquire about moving forward with the design intent established by the student team. Ideally the program will move into Phase II in which the students partner with a young design professional working within a firm.

By the end of Spring term, the goal is for the team of students to establish a relationship with their client and provide them with a design vision they can move forward with. Ideally the relationships will continue into Phase II.

*Architecture is all about communication. A beautiful design can only be executed if the designer knows how to effectively communicate not only with their clients but also with their design team and building team.*

- Alan Jones, Principle Jones Architecture
**Weekly Breakdown**

**Week One:**  
**Introduction to MCNW and their projects.**  
3/31/15  
**Attendees:** John Haines (Director MCNW) + Max Holfert (Business Leader MCNW)

**Week Two:**  
**How to have a conversation with a client that reveals all the design problem and design potential.**  
4/07/15

**Week Three:**  
**Go and Meet the Client**  
4/14/15

**Week Four:**  
**Design Charette- Idea bouncing (Bring your trace and big markers)**  
4/21/15

**Week Five:**  
**Design Presentation Development - How to present the idea to the client. Check in with Client.**  
4/28/15

**Week Six:**  
**How to do your homework with your consultant team**  
5/05/15

**Week Seven:**  
**Pin Up - Curve Ball**  
5/12/15

**Week Eight:**  
**Design Drawing- Capture the ideas visually**  
5/19/15

**Week Nine:**  
**Go and Meet with Client**  
5/26/15

**Week Ten:**  
**Deliverables - The Binder and Setting up the Future Relationship**  
6/02/15