

Michael Langer

Graduation Year: Senior

College: Arts & Letters, Architecture

Major(s): Architecture, Psychology

Minors(s): Concentration in Historic Preservation

Scholar Group Membership: Formerly Sorin Scholars

Did you received other funding for this project?: n/a

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? The CUSE funding allowed me to stay in a hotel close to the center of San Antonio and engage in tours that I otherwise would not have been able to go on. These tours were among the most helpful items to help me learn about the city and I am grateful to CUSE for being able to engage in them.

Project Title: The Built Environment, Context, and Community

Project Location: San Antonio, Texas

ND Faculty Mentor: Kimberly Rollings

Project Type: Research, Creative Endeavor

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Research/experience necessary for senior thesis or capstone project

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Yes

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Yes

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

As an architecture and psychology double major, I am very interested in the relationship between the built environment and health. During my time as a research assistant for the Architecture, Health, and Sustainability group, I have additionally become interested in the importance of integrating green space and water features in order to have a successful public space. For my thesis project, I seek to redesign the San Antonio Public Library in a location closer to San Antonio's wonderful River Walk and design it in a more sympathetic character to the historic architecture of San Antonio.

During my time in San Antonio, I prepared meetings with members from the Office of Historic Preservation, Office of Development Services, and Office of Planning and Community Development. I spent time in the Institute for Texan Cultures reading about the history of San Antonio and its architecture and visited the library to learn about its programmatic requirements. Beyond the architectural and cultural scale, I also studied the urban scale. I also took photos and sketched some of the different public places in the city to discern what objects or design techniques were consistent for successful public spaces compared to unsuccessful spaces.

What struck me most was reading about the history of the River Walk. In class and in the research group, I have read many articles about issues that help create community. These were in full display at the River Walk and this fact really stuck with me. It was hard to believe that one of the most beautiful and serene areas in America had once been considered to be filled over and spent much of its history abandoned. To revitalize, it was necessary to not only make the River Walk aesthetically pleasing, but needed a commercial aspect. The mixture between trees, native vegetation, the wide mix of people and tourists, and the incorporation of various creative forms of seating, places for groups to meet, and various venues and restaurants create an inviting atmosphere that is both active, but at the same time serene. The interaction between nature, people, and the built environment was truly inspiring as I go forward with my thesis project.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

This project had a great impact on me as a student-scholar in a few aspects. At an urban design level with respect to my research group, it was really exciting to see first-hand how so many principles mentioned in the articles I have read about are truly applicable and successful in practice. In order to create successful, normally used public spaces, incorporation of commercial areas, water features, shading, sun, and many other factors that are mentioned in the research group were clearly evident.

Visiting San Antonio was also extremely helpful with regards to my precedent studies. By reading books from the Institute for Texan Cultures, I was able to establish a timeline of prominent architectural styles throughout the history of San Antonio. I was able to take many pictures of the sites I was thinking of designing on, and I took photos of interesting building details that I can use to formulate the language of my proposed building.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

This experience is extremely helpful as I plan my thesis project during the Spring Semester. It is helpful to understand the culture of the place, take photos of my site which I will use when developing final drawings, and to take certain measurements that I would not have been able to gain simply through using Google Earth.

The experience was also helpful to engage in the process that a true architect would participate in for the "pre-design" phase. I set up meetings with planning and code officials and developed an idea of the identity of the city to be utilized while designing.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

I would advise others, namely architecture students, who are planning to engage in a site visit to plan ahead and create a schedule of places to study, photograph closely, and explore. I would recommend not being afraid to walk into government offices to speak with people (especially if they haven't been responsive via email or phone!). The libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions are also fantastic options to learn about the history of the city you are studying.

