

RURAL INTERDISCIPLINARY SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS: FRAMEWORKS FOR ENGAGEMENT WITHIN REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

Sleipness, Ole

Utah State University, Logan, UT, ole.sleipness@usu.edu

Ryan, Kathleen

Washington State University, Pullman, WA karyan@wsu.edu

Krikac, Robert

Washington State University, Pullman, WA rkrikac@wsu.edu

Gomez, Susie

Utah State University, Logan, UT, susie.gomez@aggiemail.usu.edu

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, design programs have engaged communities' tangible needs through service learning, civic engagement, and participatory action research. These approaches offer experiential learning opportunities for students and provide services to underserved communities (Lee, 2008). Recognizing these benefits, academic programs employ these models of engagement in their pedagogical approaches at the project, course, or program levels. In the current era of urbanization, rural communities and their landscapes represent an array of large scale design challenges. While landscape architecture maintains a body of work in the planning, design, and management of large-scale and rural landscapes, opportunities for allied design disciplines also exist. Relatedly, the urbanist paradigm that dominates the state of the art of contemporary design education has resulted in a reticence to equally engage in rural projects within the university studio setting. This paper showcases an alternative focus to the dominant urbanist paradigm by suggesting opportunities for university design programs to engage in rural projects. Land-grant institutions were originally conceived for applied teaching, research, and outreach, much of which was focused on rural and agricultural-based issues. Design programs situated at land-grant institutions are uniquely positioned to advance this mission. Using a content analysis of publicly available publications, we identify potential strategic opportunities for the design disciplines located at land-grant institutions within the region of the Western Rural Development Center (WRDC). We recommend ways in which design programs based in all four United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-funded Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs) can enhance their engagement in rural issues while fulfilling the land-grant missions.

Keywords

Rural, service-learning, interdisciplinary, civic engagement