

A Living Laboratory: Activity Template

We are creating a cross-disciplinary collection of teaching activities that use the best practice approaches fostered in the “Living Lab”: adoption of City Tech’s General Education Student Learning Outcomes, George Kuh’s High Impact Educational Practices, place-based learning, open digital pedagogy (the OpenLab), and formal assessment methods.

Share your best practices with your colleagues! Use this form to record a favorite activity; an activity can be as small as an in-class exercise or as large as a semester-long project. Your description can be short or extensive – take as much space as you need.

Activity Title:	Critical Research, Analysis and Design Development for a 21 st Century New York City Public Library
Your Name:	Joseph Vidich, Adjunct Lecturer
Department:	Architectural Technology
Course:	Design Six: Urban Ecology and Library Design Studio
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Activity Description:

Provide a brief description of the activity.

The assignment is a design based activity requiring the students to research, conceptualize and design a new public library for Red Hook, Brooklyn. Although there is an existing library in that neighborhood, the students are to assume that it is not satisfactorily fulfilling the needs of the community. This assumption is not without precedent. There is extensive research by the Center for a New Urban Future (<https://nycfuture.org/research/publications/re-envisioning-new-yorks-branch-libraries>) that the current state of New York Public Libraries is lacking and falls behind other major US cities. The issue at hand is that many New York City public libraries are poorly configured for how New Yorkers are using libraries today, with little space for classes, group work or individuals working on laptop computers. Meanwhile, the libraries are not fully taking advantage of new technologies, and they have only begun to design branches in ways that improve how they serve specific populations, such as seniors and teens.

This assignment is a two-part activity focusing on place based research, active learning, gathering information through observation, critical analysis of urban issues and developing a design based solution to these issues. The first activity requires the students, working in pairs, to analyze the current New York City public Library in Red Hook and the surrounding community. They are asked to identify the needs of the community and how the current library satisfies or neglects those needs. Throughout the research and analysis phase the students develop a hypothesis to define what a public library’s role in the 21st century should be. The students create visual diagrams and written statements describing the quality of services, civic engagement with the community, and the range of programs geared toward the diverse population of Red Hook.

The second activity requires each individual student to create a set of unique program or function elements, based on the evidence and research compiled previously, to enhance the library experience for all of Red Hook’s citizens. Each student must take a critical position on what a 21st century library could be in order to develop a comprehensive design strategy.

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Learning Goals:

What do you aim to achieve with this activity?

The principal goal is to teach the students the benefits of primary source research and the ability to synthesize this information in order to develop a comprehensive, evidence based design solution. Through this activity I stress that a clear and thoughtful analysis, whether of the site, the culture, the history or the demographics of the community, is critical to the conceptual success of any architectural project.

Too often students design within a vacuum and don't thoroughly consider the impact, both visual and physical, their architectural designs could have on the surrounding community. Ultimately the students must leverage and integrate their aesthetic values with the requirements of the community.

Timing:

At what point in the lesson or semester to you use this activity? How much classroom time do you devote to it? How much out-of-class time is expected?

This is one of the major assignments in this design course. It is assigned in the 3rd week of the semester and progresses for approximately 4 weeks during which time the students present their projects publicly to the class for peer review and I meet with each of them individually to evaluate progress. This assignment requires substantial out-of-class time and therefore each student is expected to put in 6-8 hours per week (a minimum of 40 hours total).

Logistics:

What preparation is needed for this activity? What instructions do you give students?

Prior to this assignment the students have done an initial analysis and investigation into the neighborhood of Red Hook. During this time they familiarize themselves with the community, the needs of the neighborhood and what could be done to improve the quality of life. Before they begin the library analysis and program proposal we discuss existing, built libraries that have been successful in serving their community. Specifically we discuss libraries that have novel approaches to what a 21st century library could be, such as innovations in technology or use patterns. I try not to direct their research in any specific way but rather present them with precedent projects and readings that could be useful to them.

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General Education SLOs:

Which of City Tech's [General Education Student Learning Outcomes](#) does this activity address?

SKILLS

- Communicate in diverse settings and groups, using written (both reading and writing), oral (both speaking and listening), and visual means, and in more than one language. Inquiry/ Analysis
- Derive meaning from experience, as well as gather information from observation.
- Understand and employ both quantitative and qualitative analysis to describe and solve problems, both independently and cooperatively.
- Use creativity to solve problems

VALUE, ETHICS AND RELATIONSHIPS

- Demonstrate social and civic knowledge.
- Understand organizations and histories underlying government in a global context.
- Apply knowledge and analyze social, political, economic, and historical issues.
- Show ability to contribute actively by applying knowledge to the identification and analysis of societal and professional problems to enact solutions.

High Impact Educational Practices:

Which of [George Kuh's High Impact Educational Practices](#) does this activity incorporate? Does it use the [OpenLab](#) for [open digital pedagogy](#)? Does it include [place-based learning](#)? Choose all that apply and/or add your own.

George Kuh's High Impact Educational Practices:

- ☐ First-year seminars and experiences
- ☐ Learning communities
- X Collaborative assignments and projects
- ☐ Diversity and global learning ("difficult differences")
- ☐ Internships

- ☐ Common intellectual experiences (core curriculum)
- ☐ Writing-intensive courses
- ☐ Undergraduate research
- X Service- or community-based learning
- ☐ Capstone courses and projects

X **Open Digital Pedagogy (the OpenLab)**

X **Place-Based Learning**

☐ **Other (please describe):**

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Assessment:

How do you assess this activity? What assessment measures do you use? Do you include your evaluation in grade calculations?

The students are assessed as they progress throughout the assignment. There are a series of ungraded public peer reviews and then a graded, more substantial presentation at the end. This assignment is one of several that are graded holistically at the end of the semester based on overall depth of research, synthesis of information, originality of concept, and the general rigor in the design and final presentation.

Reflection:

How has this assignment impacted your teaching? What challenges did you encounter and how did you address them? What feedback did students provide? How would you imagine this activity being used in different disciplines?

I encourage my students to imagine themselves in these spaces, to imagine how they would use a library and what services they would want. I believe the students are a critical demographic for the renewed interest and use of public libraries in the coming decade. I emphasize that in order to become good designers they need to make the community's issues *their* issues, they need to learn to emphasize with the individuals they are designing for. I ask them to create narratives for at least three specific users for their library so that they can design a building to capture the story of that person's life. For example: how would a senior citizen learning a second language use the library differently than a group of young entrepreneurs who need meeting space? Getting the students to step into the lives of the people they are designing for has been the hardest part of this assignment. Inevitably they bring too much of their own biases into the design process without realizing that the community may have other needs. This is where their initial research and analysis can hopefully help guide them.

Additional Information:

Please share any additional comments and further documentation of the activity - e.g. assignment instructions, rubrics, examples of student work, etc. These could be in the form of PDF or Word files, links to posts or files on the OpenLab, etc.

The following link is the page for the research assignment, please note that the student work here is for Spring 2015 and does not reflect all changes for this Activity Template:

<https://cunyarch3610.wordpress.com/>

Note: This is a wordpress site that will be linked from OpenLab