

The Pennsylvania State University Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State

Project Title

The Secret Life of Public Spaces

Applicant Organization and Contact Information

Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State

The Pennsylvania State University

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Project Overview

The Secret Life of Public Spaces proposes that a rediscovery of movement (people), topography (surfaces), and devices (objects), based on inquiry and performance will reveal and recast the everyday dynamics of public spaces. Student performances will build on the interplay of movement and devices. Their explorations of community and campus spaces will introduce a third element - topography - and bring active topography to the theater stage.

Key Outcomes

- Model for transformative interdisciplinary collaboration with long-term impact
- E-learning modules and open courseware that will be institutionalized for future course offerings
- Altered curricula in Penn State's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
- Performances that capitalize on the interplay between people, objects, and spaces
- Broadened and enriched educational experiences of students in the College of Arts Architecture and the College of Engineering

Project Partners (Campus and Community)

Pennsylvania State University

Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (SALA)

Department of Dance

College of Engineering

The Learning Factory

College of Arts Architecture E-Learning Institute

Penn State University Center for the Study of Higher Education

H.O. Smith Arboretum

Artists (Visiting Artists, Faculty Artists, Student Artists, Community Artists)

The project involves artists, students, and faculty in a new course exploring the interaction of people, large kinetic objects, and the topography of public spaces, resulting in new work:

Diavolo Dance Theater, Jacques Heim, artistic director

Project Summary Narrative

Our team proposes a residency/creation program between Penn State students and faculty in architecture, landscape architecture, dance and engineering, with secondary partnership with the H.O. Smith Botanic Gardens in the Arboretum at Penn State and the E-Learning Institute in the College of Arts and Architecture. Our artistic partner in the project is Los Angeles-based Diavolo Dance Theater, Jacques Heim, artistic director.

The collaboration between the student/faculty team and Diavolo will result in two unique dance works. Coursework developed and team-taught by faculty in Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Dance will be offered over two semesters for development of the project, including the choreographic work, the exploration of local public spaces, and the design and fabrication of a structure to be utilized in the student dance piece. The planned course title will be LARCH/ARCH/Dance 497A, Special Topics Movement, Machines, and Topography. The course description reads, "This course is a research and studio based inquiry that begins with an examination of pedestrian movement and patterns across campus. In response, students will collaboratively design and choreograph dance works, performance spaces, surfaces, and machines."

The Secret Life of Public Spaces proposes that a rediscovery of movement (people), topography (surfaces), and devices (objects), based on inquiry and performance will reveal and recast the everyday dynamics of public spaces: University Parks Old Main Lawn, the Arboretum, and a local public park. Student performances will build on the interplay of movement and devices—a central theme of Diavolo's work. Their explorations of community and campus spaces will introduce a third element – topography – and inspire Diavolo to bring active topography to the theater stage.

The project serves as a prototype for a campus-wide program in development that seeks to enhance student scholarship through disciplinary engagement outside the classroom and beyond the bounds of conventional service-learning. *The Secret Life of Public Spaces* also serves as a model partnership for faculty and students across college collaboration, utilizing expertise and creativity to create entrepreneurial knowledge with constructive applications on campus and in communities, both local and global.

Guiding ideas, project design, and implementation plans have been driven by the faculty, whose research and creative activity overlap and for whom the project represents an opportunity to build on their existing work through collaboration, engage their scholarship with students, and reciprocally benefit from the relationship with Diavolo.

Diavolo has been presented by the Center for the Performing Arts in the past, and there is mutual desire to collaborate on an innovative new project. We have partnered with Diavolo Dance Theatre based on their unique way of working with kinetic objects. Their performances often center on a large object upon which the choreography is developed. Combining these objects with the topography of public spaces (e.g., parks) provides a novel artistic challenge for Diavolo. They will serve as resident advisors/guest critics on the design and development of the collaborative dance performances and kinetic objects created by students and faculty. The world-premiere work by Diavolo Dance Theatre will be performed at Eisenhower Auditorium and continue on international tours.

Expected Outcomes and Evaluation

The Secret Life of Public Spaces accelerates the confluence of interdisciplinary collaboration, public engagement, and creative thinking practices that span multiple colleges at a large-scale public university. The project provides a model for transformative interdisciplinary collaboration with long-term impact. E-learning modules and open courseware will be developed, deployed, and validated in multiple courses in dance, architecture, landscape architecture, and engineering these modules and open courseware will be institutionalized for future course offerings to ensure a sustainable impact of the proposed effort.

The proposed project fundamentally alters the professional curricula in Penn States School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture by forging novel project-based collaborations within the School. Meanwhile, interactions between dance, architecture, and landscape architecture will lead to performances that capitalize on the interplay between people, objects, and spaces. Finally, the interplay of project-based collaborations between the College of Arts Architecture and College of Engineering will broaden and enrich the educational experiences of students in both colleges. These transformations will occur through a vigorous, collaborative, hands-on educational experience that will expose students (and faculty) in multiple colleges to discipline-specific skills, technologies, and practices to enrich their professional prospects.

The proposed project also has seismic implications for the dance program at Penn State. It has enormous impact on students and faculty in dance who have not had the opportunity to work in a sustained and intensive way with a professional artist. It affords dance students the opportunity to work in collaborative nature with peers in other areas of study, to work with a master choreographer and professional dancers, and to have alternative performance experiences off the proscenium stage. It develops artists who see greater possibilities in the scope of the dance world.

The University Dance Company will be reimagined to emulate Diavolos company model. Students will be responsible for creating movement to be used, keeping journals about the project, participating in the artistic exploration of ideas, and reading/viewing materials that are pertinent to the project mirroring the work of a Diavolo Company dancer. This differs from the traditional student-company model in which students are given movement from a choreographer and not asked for input. This new collaborative and interactive structure allows students a voice, gives them responsibility for their artistic growth, and has lasting impact. Finally, with the introduction of the element of topography, dance students will be the catalysts for site-specific explorations of objects, drawing in community partners both on and off campus.

Evaluation will be conducted formally by Penn State's Center for the Study of Higher Education, and will involve a percentage of a faculty member's time, as well as a quarter-time graduate student assigned exclusively to the project. Additionally, the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment has provided the Strategy Implementation Matrix tool to use for evaluation - the same tool that is being used to evaluate and assess the University's strategic plan. The evaluation project is a combined strategy of formative and summative evaluation where all the evaluation metrics can be traced back to the overarching goals of the project. The formative component of the evaluation is designed to collect data throughout the term of the project with the objective of encouraging reflection and synchronization of the various activities across the participating colleges. Bi-monthly meetings with all the partners enable the team to rapidly integrate evaluation lessons into the program. The project is also tightly integrated into

students' academics. For students and faculty, the studio model of project-based learning allows iterative, one-on-one feedback. The faculty provides written evaluations of the students' work. Each semester, pre- and post- surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews with a cross-section of the academic participants is conducted, as well as surveys and interviews (random sampling) of community members that attend the public events. Artists from Diavolo Dance Theater will be giving consistent feedback throughout several planned visits to campus.