

**Gaines Center for the Humanities
Jury Project Progress Report
Jenna Brashear
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Muhlenberg County Auditorium Proposal Progress Report

Since submitting my proposal in September, I have made progress in some very obvious areas. To begin, I finished assembling my jury. In addition to my senior mentor, Linsen Li, I received commitments from two architects. My University of Kentucky contact is Drura Parrish, an instructor in the School of Architecture. He is from Henderson, Kentucky, a town similar in geography and mentality to my target community, and he was able to broaden my idea of what I wanted to accomplish. Because he has very different thought processes, I recognized immediately that he would be a valuable resource in pointing out obstacles or areas of opportunity of which I could not conceive.

Holly Wiedemann agreed to serve as my community mentor. She is the owner and director of AU Associates, a Lexington firm that specializes in adaptive reuse and historic preservation. Both she and Mr. Parrish were adamant that I consider the rehabilitation of an old building, an idea that I am fond of, but also an idea that I am aware will not likely make much headway in Muhlenberg County. Historic preservation of a building such as the old tobacco warehouse would have undeniable character and flair, but it would also be expensive. Additionally, many of the historic buildings are in inconvenient locations. Aside from that suggestion, Holly was able to provide a lot of help in finding the best people to talk to and the right approach to take.

The aforementioned two issues have been the biggest challenges. It remains a struggle to talk to people about a “college project” in a tone that maintains my own knowledge of my stature in making such a large undertaking happen but also my optimism

and sincere belief that this a necessary venture that would be a great asset to the schools and the community. I do not want to be presumptuous, but I do want to be taken seriously, and considering what I do know about the small-town politics that must be waded through and tip-toed around in order to make a project happen, the tone is everything. For the present, it has not been too much of a problem because most of the people I have spoken with are allies of the arts and humanities.

In the same vein, I took advice from Holly and Drura and decided to create a survey exploring the needs of various groups. One goal of this is obviously to have a product to hand in aside from my own opinions, and the other goal is to collect as much feedback as possible from interested parties. I included an introduction, a few questions about the humanities backgrounds of those surveyed, and inquiries about the optimal arts space for the community. One challenge of the project was deciding whether to propose a minimal, realistic plan that would perhaps be taken more seriously or to propose the most lavish possibility in the hopes of getting more resources for more groups. Eventually I decided for the latter, and thus the survey contains questions about the need for every option I could think of—classrooms, offices, an orchestra pit, etc.

The last important development was the news in mid-November of the School Board's sudden decision to consolidate the two high schools, the two primary institutions I hoped to serve with my proposal. In the transition plan, which is the only information currently available to the public, freshmen and sophomores will attend school at Muhlenberg South High—soon to be south campus—and juniors and seniors will attend classes at Muhlenberg North High—soon to be north campus. Setting most of my personal feelings aside, this change (to begin in the fall of 2009) will most likely have the strongest

adverse affects on extracurricular groups and activities, many of which are arts organizations such as the band and the drama club. Though I refrain from too much optimism in the face of authorities that made such a decision with no deference to the teachers or community, I see the short-term negative affects as a potentially valuable leveraging tool for an auditorium. I am hoping the arts community will stand together and emerge stronger from this change.

Aside from concrete developments, I have started to experiment with the design program Google SketchUp. While I am aware that I cannot devote too much time to learning to use this tool, I am excited about the possibility of a visual component that could be added to the proposal. I have learned thus far the basics in the exterior portions of designing a building and hope to devote time to the interior components during winter break. I would not have asked an architect to make a model knowing how time-consuming those projects are, but I have felt all along that the project would be well-served by something that is eye-catching and more concrete than just an idea. Moreover, it is an opportunity for me to express my true wishes for what this auditorium could be.

Though I have by no means hit a home run, I am about where I thought I would be in regards to progress. It was my hope all along to do the biggest portion of communicating during winter break when I would be home and therefore in quicker contact with the people who can help me. Once I have feedback from everyone looking at my survey, I will be able to distribute them and make the final conclusions about what the needs are and how they could be addressed. I remain cautiously optimistic and hope that my project can contribute to the community even if the final aim is too lofty for these difficult economic times.