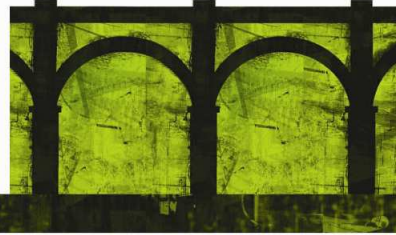


the partnership for better education



Contact: Susan Feightner
Phone: (315) 443-1525
sfeightn@syr.edu
October 2007

SU students transforming RV into mobile digital photo lab for use by Syracuse city high school students

A group of 10 Syracuse University students is in the middle of an unusual course assignment this semester: to redesign and refurbish the inside of a large recreational vehicle in 15 weeks. But the group's conceptual and physical renovations have a purpose: next year, the completely renovated RV will travel from SU to Syracuse City School District high schools participating in The Partnership for Better Education. The RV will contain a mobile classroom complete with a photo lab that includes digital cameras, laptops and printers. With local high schools lacking the space and in some cases the ability to afford up-to-date technology, the new Mobile Literacy Arts Bus (M-LAB) will provide both needed working space and technology for high school students participating in The Partnership for Better Education's "Art, Literacy and Technology (ALT)" program.

In November 2006, State Sen. David J. Valesky (D-Oneida) secured a legislative grant in the amount of \$15,000, and Robert W. Pomfrey, president of the POMCO Group, announced a matching gift for a total \$30,000 contribution to The Partnership for Better Education to provide additional classroom resources. These funds have been used to purchase and rehabilitate the RV into a functioning, mobile digital photo lab and writing classroom-or M-LAB.

On Oct. 25, Valesky and Pomfrey will visit campus to meet with the student design team and tour for the first time the RV and early renovations being done to transform it into the M-LAB for use in the spring.

"The Mobile Literacy Arts Bus is the tangible result of this very real partnership between private and public for the benefit the local community," said Sen. Valesky. "With Syracuse University, POMCO Group, and this legislative grant, we are harnessing the talents of Syracuse University students and create an enriching experience for Syracuse City students. It is truly a great partnership and an exciting program."

"POMCO is pleased to support this new M-LAB project, which when completed will provide Syracuse City school students with an exciting, state-of-the-art community resource for years to come," said Robert W. Pomfrey, president of POMCO Group.

Since the first class day of this fall semester, SU students have been steadily gutting and refurbishing the interior of the used RV recreational vehicle. As part of a full, three-credit, one time course, students have formed a collaborative design team to completely modernize the functioning RV into a mobile class space. The students-nine undergraduates and one graduate student from the College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA), the School of Architecture, the Newhouse School and The College of Art and Sciences, many of whom are sculpture or architecture majors-are being introduced to all aspects of creating a large-scale interactive public art work, including idea and design proposal, gaining approval, community interaction, fundraising, designing, re-fabricating, programming and marketing of a used 30' RV into the M-LAB. The students have already gutted and prepped the RV, including the removal of the interior space right down to the frame, and have also held a community-wide focus group to present preliminary designs, created a mail art postcard distributed to all four area high schools to solicit design drawings; built a to-scale model; completed the final design and working drawings; designed a ramp for accessibility; and began a collection of recycled wood for the floor and interior furnishings.

Marion Wilson, director of community initiatives for VPA and instructor for the course, says that the M-LAB class, Social Sculpture, is a practical seminar on aspects of public sculpture. Students research critical texts on arts in the social realm, brainstorm with community groups to discuss issues of accessibility and programming and provide the hands on design and fabrication. "The most challenging and exciting part of the project so far has been to transform the traditional college class structure into a working design team. We work side by side as equal artists/designers - in constant dialog with one another -on materials, design solutions and budget. Everything gets recorded on our blog and we make decisions based on lots of discussion. The teachers and students who will ultimately use the space are brought into that process from the beginning."

"Ultimately, we want to create an environment that changes the culture of learning, focusing on the individual and creativity in an intimate, multi-functional and transmutable space," says Wilson. "We envision M-LAB to be an art gallery, a library, a teaching center, a digital lab that becomes both a part of and a alternative to the classroom/school that it is attached to at a given time."

The M-LAB is an initiative of VPA's participation in The Partnership for Better Education, a collaborative alliance between SU, area colleges and universities and the Syracuse City School District to assist city students in pursuing higher education by providing new opportunities for quality instruction and by improving students' access to the arts and creative resources for study.

The Partnership for Better Education uses learning communities as the framework for focused interaction between SU and the SCSD, and works to expose students to creative

approaches to arts, literacy, science and technology, engineering and math. One of the most popular programs under the Partnership for Better Education umbrella is the ALT course, a collaborative photography and writing program where SCSD high school students-taught by SU faculty and graduate students-learn to photograph scenes from their lives, and then use those images as catalysts for verbal and written expression. The ALT program aims to enhance students' literacy skills using the personal experiences of photography and journal writing, and utilizes a portable digital darkroom that includes 60 digital cameras, four laptop computers and four high-end color printers-all of which will be transported by the M-LAB to participating high schools for student use. The portable digital darkroom was funded last year by a \$100,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation.

A blog created by one of the SU M-LAB design team members can be found at <http://mobileliteracyartsbus.blogspot.com>, and regularly provides updates, student reflections and photos of the group's progress. Once the renovations are complete, there will be a formal, public unveiling of the M-LAB in the spring 2008 semester.

"The beauty of the M-LAB project is that through a collaborative design process we can directly address the issues outside our college classroom, but within our own community," says Julia Dalton, a senior in the School of Architecture.

Adds Samantha Harmon, a senior sculpture major in VPA: "This class is about stepping outside of the "me- based" realm of studio practice into the us/he/she/they/we space of a collaborative community project, where instead of an abstract notion of audience, we have a very tangible group of people who we must consider, engage and sustain on a number of levels."