

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

I ILLINOIS Extension

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER &
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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U of I Extension facilitated a connection between U of I School of Architecture and City of Peoria and Peoria Park District that benefited the students and community. Saloni Sheth participated in the “[re]Imagine West Main” project this past spring and returned to Peoria to complete a summer project at Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum.

Illinois Extension and U of I School of Architecture Provide Service Learning Opportunities to Students that Positively Impact the Community

University of Illinois School of Architecture student Saloni Sheth took her experience from the spring “[re]Imagine West Main” project to the next level as she worked this summer at the Peoria Park District’s Peoria PlayHouse Children’s Museum. Kathleen Brown, U of I Extension community and economic development educator serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties facilitated the connection between U of I and the City of Peoria and Peoria Park District for those projects.

Working with a team of museum and park district staff, Saloni developed a proposal for a temporary exhibit space at the PlayHouse Museum. This involved considering the needs of the museum and its visitors, relocating existing exhibit components, and creating a temporary exhibit space with storage. “Her design work at the museum will transform sections of the museum on three different floors of the museum, reinventing the use of existing spaces for programming possibilities,” described Brown.

Saloni’s engagement with Peoria, her hometown, came about as a carryover from her spring semester project, along work with U of I Extension, as part of the “[re]Imagine West Main”, during which – University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Architecture students designed work to assist in developing and visualizing small-scale interventions that could improve the West Main corridor in Peoria.

“Saloni was a great fit for this service project, as the project had elements of both architecture and construction management,” mentioned Brown.

The connection between the city and the university, facilitated by U of I Extension, demonstrates the benefits for both students and community members when they engage in complex issues together. Saloni, along with her classmates, actively engaged in learning while providing a service to the community. “It was encouraging to Saloni to be able to give back to her hometown,” stated Brown. “Service learning combines academics, skills, citizenship, and values.

“For many who participate, it provides experiences which help solidify the connections between the classroom and the ‘real world.’” Additional benefits noted by U of I School of Architecture include networking with other students and professionals in a variety of careers, and preparing students for living and supporting their communities.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson, U of I Extension

These projects are just two examples in which Extension staff have provided key leadership to facilitate collaborations between U of I campus and local communities. Faculty and students, along with community leaders have recognized positive impacts and expressed great satisfaction.