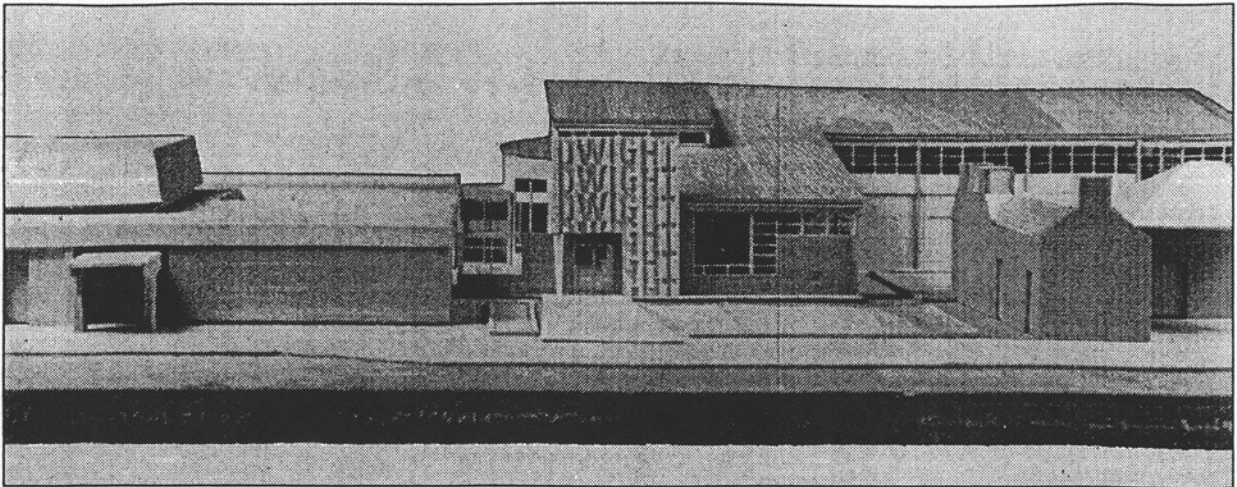


Wednesday, October 7, 1998



COURTESY RICH CASPOLE

One student's project, above, is a design for an area in the Dwight neighborhood. The work is part of the School of Architecture's Urban Design Workshop.

## Students experiment with city design

By Antje Kersten  
Contributing Reporter

When the president of another university told Associate Dean of the Yale School of Architecture Alan Plattus '76 that Yale would be the greatest university if it could just move out of New Haven, only one answer seemed appropriate to him: "Yale is the greatest university, precisely [because] it is in New Haven."

Yale's downtown location offers unique opportunities for students to gain professional and social work experiences. This is especially true for students involved in the School of Architecture's Urban Design Workshop, a group started by Plattus six years ago that designs socially responsible projects in New Haven.

The UDW, composed of students and faculty and headed by Alan Plattus and his co-director Michael Haverland, has undertaken numerous projects to assist neighborhoods in identifying and meeting their urban needs.

Students from the UDW received hands-on experience helping residents in Middletown, Conn. develop a plan for the revitalization of their city. They also studied the redevelopment of New Haven's Church Street South Housing Project to make the place more livable and to attract new tenants.

The UDW's biggest project at the moment is to plan an additional 9,300 square-foot facility for New Haven's Timothy Dwight Elementary School.

The building is expected to have its share in bringing the Dwight neighborhood closer together, offer-

ing a place for community gatherings within its multi-purpose room, offices and meeting rooms.

"The idea is to enhance the school's function as a community center," said Haverland, the assistant professor at the Yale School of Architecture and project designer for the Dwight School addition. "People see a sign of progress, a sign of hope. The [new] building will be a visible manifestation of the community coming together and working hard for their goals."

Haverland started working on the Dwight School Addition Project four years ago, when the UDW developed a neighborhood plan for the Dwight community. The way the UDW creates a neighborhood plan centers around listening to people from the neighborhood and collecting their ideas.

In order to get as many residents as possible involved in the Dwight project, they held a three or four day workshop in 1995, inviting the whole community.

The members of the UDW tried to learn as much as they could about the neighborhood from the about participating 300 residents. Then they developed designs and a plan to turn their visions into reality.

"We treat them as equal collaborators," Haverland said. "We listen and spend a lot of time with the people of the neighborhood to learn how they want their community developed. It is a process of listening and engaging. We try to get people involved in every level of decision making, so that they will take the ownership and responsibility for [the building]. It will be a

greater contribution for the community, because it comes from the community."

Because it has no independent funding of its own, the UDW helps its clients to apply for grants.

The State of Connecticut will pay for approximately 80 percent of the \$2 million project. The Greater Dwight Development Corporation, a grassroots non-profit organization working to redevelop the Dwight neighborhood, will cover the rest.

The UDW fits into the bigger picture of the School of Architecture's philosophy because the schools wants to convey the "idea that architecture is not just a pretty picture, not just staying in the studio, but making a real contribution to the community," Plattus said. "Students learn how cities really work, not just as ideals in books. They get extremely sophisticated about the way in which cities function."

Students of the UDW are equally convinced that their work helps to bring Yale and New Haven closer together.

"Only in a very few schools you get the opportunity to gain such an experience. It's a social classroom as much as it is a design classroom," said Billy Forrest ARCH '99, who works with the Dwight School project. "It is a vehicle to improve the relationship between the university and the city."

Haverland estimated that the construction of the Dwight School addition will start in May or June 1999, and the building will open in the fall of the same year. The UDW will be in charge of the construction administration until the project is finished.