Revitalization of the Downtown Square in a Small Rural City:

The Impact of the University

By

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Abstract

Urbanization

Millennials (born 1984-2002) are migrating to large cities (urbanization) while the population of smaller towns is dwindling (Duljsens, 2010). Across the United States, there are also vibrant universities housed within the city limits of several small towns (Perry & Wiewel, 2005). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find blight and vacant buildings in a downtown area that is only a few miles from a prosperous university; the disparities of vacancy against dense activity are perplexing. The purpose of this research study is to determine what unique benefits a local university can contribute toward the revitalization of a small town – in particular, the courthouse square area. Effective revitalization has the potential to impact a city's economy, attract and retain younger residents, and benefit the local university.

Marion, Indiana

The platform for this research was Marion, Indiana. It is a small town with a rich history of manufacturing and whose population has reduced dramatically in the last two decades to fewer than 30,000 people. Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU) resides in Marion; it houses over 3,000 students on a 320-acre campus. Marion residents and civic leaders (aged 18-100) and IWU residential campus students and administrators (aged 18-65) serve as the sample for this study.

Design Thinking

Research was conducted over a three-month period concluding with a presentation to the city of Marion and the IWU administrative leadership. A combination of literature review, precedent studies, and data collection utilizing design-thinking

methods comprehensively contributed to the findings. Design thinking requires the participation of stakeholders to work alongside designers for an empathic process that eliminates risk of assumptive conclusions. Various design thinking strategies revealed preferences for revitalization by stakeholders; these strategies were conducted with multiple individuals: the Looking (inspiration), Understanding (ideation), and Making (implementation) phases.

Universities and Cities

"Factories have left the cities. Regional department stores have been displaced by national chains…urban universities, however, rarely abandon their cities" (Perry & Wiewel, 2005, p. xi). This study suggests the stability of a university can contribute to successful revitalization of a small city's courthouse square. Such influence has the potential to impact the town's economy, benefit the local university, retain younger residents (i.e., university graduates and Millennials), and promote a vibrant community for permanent residents of all ages.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Millennials (born 1984-2002) are migrating to large cities (urbanization) while the population of smaller towns is dwindling (Duljsens, 2010). Across the United States, there are also vibrant universities housed within the city limits of several small towns (Perry & Wiewel, 2005). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find blight and vacant buildings in a downtown area that is only a few miles from a prosperous university; the disparities of vacancy against dense activity are perplexing.

Marion, Indiana

The platform for this research is Marion, Indiana. It is a town with a rich history of manufacturing whose population has reduced dramatically in the last two decades to less than 30,000 people. This small rural city has been the author's home since 1991. My husband and I moved to Marion with our one year old daughter and another daughter on the way. Traveling to the campus of Indiana Wesleyan University, our host drove us through the south end of town on Nebraska Street, a thoroughfare from downtown to the campus. We were struck by the blight flanking the road as we looked out the car window in all directions. Homes that appeared to have been stately in their prime were dilapidated, with yards in disarray. When we reached the edge of campus, the house facades lined with multiple black metal mailboxes gave evidence to the transformations of single-family homes into apartments for students. Marion has remained stagnant in the past two decades. For every new business that emerges, another struggling one disappears (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Marion Downtown Square

Historically, Marion was once immersed in a gas boom followed by an economy bolstered by manufacturing – profitable years in the 1950's. Yet, the city has not discovered how to redefine itself. The gradual loss of jobs in the past 40 years has branded Marion as a commuter city. Many commute from nearby cities where their family life contributes to the economy of other city centers. The current population of 29,948 is a drop of 5.6% in the last 15 years. Seventy-eight percent are European American, 14% are African American, 5% are Hispanic or Latino, and the remaining segments each drop below 1% in representation (History, 2015).

Within the Marion socio-cultural milieu, there are several difficult challenges. One painful problem is a history of discrimination; a specific incident is the lynching of three African American men, the last lynching in Indiana. After being involved in a robbery leading to a murder, the threesome were pulled out of the city jail by leaders of a mob to exact some form of justice and taken across the street to a tree located in the courthouse square. Two of the men, Abram Smith and Thomas Shiff, were beaten to

death prior to being hanged. James Cameron was the sole survivor; although he too had been severely beaten and hung for a brief time, he was miraculously spared (Carr, 2006).

This lynching story still permeates the soul of Marion's history. Yet, another prominent figure highlights a wonderful contrast, a glimpse into Marion's rich history. Samuel Plato, an African American architect, worked in Marion for 19 years (1902 to 1921). He built several historic buildings in town including the Hostess House. And, he was the first African American contracted to build government buildings, including thirty-eight post offices (see Figure 22; History, n.d.).

Figure 2. Samuel Plato

Indiana Wesleyan University

Indiana Wesleyan University's private, not-for-profit, residential campus was founded in 1920. When my family arrived on campus in 1991 to live and work in Williams Hall, a men's residence hall, the campus population was approximately 400 students. Its current campus enrollment is 3,118 housed on 320 acres. At one point it was the fastest growing private university in the Midwest and it has spent nearly $350 million on campus facilities in the past 20 years.

My husband and I have observed a significant transformation from a “church camp retreat” atmosphere with mediocre academic expectations to a pristine campus of stately red brick buildings and rigorous classroom expectations. It offers over 80 undergraduate degrees and 38 graduate degrees. The Art and Design division offers 8 majors and 10 minors with its largest enrollment in Graphic Design and Photography. A new major called Design for Social Impact is a partial catalyst for this research project.

Indiana Wesleyan University’s Art and Design division is the largest private university art program in the Midwest. It has grown from forty to over three hundred students and has expanded from one building to two. Unfortunately, the buildings are located at opposite ends of campus, affecting the distinct unity of the faculty, who wish for a single building that can support a more collaborative working environment (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Indiana Wesleyan University

Possibilities of Collaboration

Recent conversations among faculty and students have included considerations about the Art and Design building being located on Marion's courthouse square. New administrative leadership at IWU and Marion appear to be open to innovative ideas and embrace active collaboration between the university and city. The courthouse square is only a ten-minute (3.4 miles) drive from campus. Presently, there are several local businesses and many vacant buildings (see Figure 4). Any of the vacant buildings has the potential to accommodate the 50,000 square feet of footprint needed for a unified structure for the Art and Design division.

Figure 4. Views of Marion Downtown Square

Several concerns surrounding the possibility of moving the Art and Design division to downtown Marion naturally emerge. Issues of safety for our students,

transportation, cohesion with the main campus, and prospective students' perception will need attention. While unanticipated obstacles are inevitable with a bold and innovative move, there is hope among the Art and Design faculty that benefits would outweigh any hurdles.

Interestingly, grass roots conversations among the Art and Design students are saturated with a strong desire for a vibrant, collaborative atmosphere between IWU and Marion. Their passions to use their creative abilities to work for positive change in the Marion community led to concrete action. For instance, students in last year's Senior Exhibit course, which has the outcome of creating a gallery exhibit of conceptual work for students' capstone projects, chose to use a vacant downtown building to display their art work. Without the assistance of Art and Design professors, they established a relationship with the owner of a building to renovate the spaces in preparation for their exhibit. The students' initiative has helped pave the way for the faculty to generate future conversations with the downtown leadership.

Is a collaborative relationship of innovation and implementation toward the revitalization of the downtown area of Marion, Indiana, including a permanent campus presence of the Indiana Wesleyan University Art and Design division, beneficial to the mission statements of both the city of Marion and the residential campus of IWU? While the question is specific to a particular city and university, it contributes as a case study for future examination when other researchers search keywords and phrases such as downtown revitalization, university location, art education, collaboration, community centers, small town renewal, historic preservation, small town blight, downtown campus, creative place-making, and art communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To answer the aforementioned question, a brief history of how cities transitioned to a condition needing renewal will be followed by case studies of large and small cities whose university presence has impacted the downtowns. Strategies for revitalization partnerships are examined, including a discussion of gaps in knowledge about the subject, suggesting the need for further research.

A Brief History of America's Downtown

The growth and decline of cities is complex and unpredictable. No single identifier is recognized as the predictor for what causes population fluctuation (Ofori-Amoah, 2007). Causes include suburbanization, economic recession, loss of industry, and globalization (Burayidl, 2015).

By the nineteenth century, American city centers included a wide variety of specialty buildings, setting the stage for an explosion of specialty architecture after the Civil War. For instance, office skyscrapers, luxury hotels, and shopping arcades characterized the new American downtown (Ford, 2003). In the twentieth century, there was a golden age of cities inspired by the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Urban embellishments became popular. Civic centers, new city halls, libraries, and grand boulevards were a part of good city planning. There was a building boom in 1928 with tall towers and luxury apartments. By 1938, Marion was a vibrant, prosperous community supported by an economic foundation of manufacturing businesses (see Figure 5; History, n.d.).

Figure 5. Marion, Indiana downtown square, 1938

During the 1950's, cities' downtown spaces became notably worn (Ford, 2003). And, people started to leave cities because their jobs were being relocated to the suburbs. Factories were shutting down, new government housing was emerging in suburbs, education quality was declining due to a shrinking tax base, crime was increasing, and blight was prolific (Kromer, 2010).

Interestingly, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Americans returned to cities. Urban centers became more attractive, clean, and safe. More educational options, dining, shopping, and entertainment venues became available. Baby boomers whose children left the nest had more freedom to downsize to townhouses or condominiums. New construction and creative reuse of historic buildings would draw young people who desire to engage in current culture of food, arts, and music while technology has freed them from the tether of the office (Kromer, 2010). The combination of diverse generations, attractive venues, and new technology brings America to an age of downtown revitalization. Despite the homogenization trend of the last century, downtowns have become distinct with character (Ford, 2003).

Resilient Downtowns

In 2007, the world crossed a threshold -- more than half of the world's population living in urban communities (Duljsens, 2010). Cities now have power to encourage diversity and attract artists and intellectuals; entrepreneurship is often sparked in environments such as these. To encourage innovation, obstacles need to be reduced. Too many hurdles exist in under-served urban areas (Besel & Nur, 2013). Yet, Michael Burayidl (2015) identified ten key strategies used in resilient downtowns. First, **leadership needs to** realize the importance of the image for telling the story. Current images of blight, vacancy, and crime-ridden buildings, streets, and alleyways need to return to the historical images of safety and vibrancy. Second, communities should be aware that adjacent neighborhoods need to be maintained. Neighborhoods lining the downtown must also feel safe and not slide into declining property value, increased crime, and vacant housing. Third, the daytime population needs to be active because people like to go where other people gather. A downtown that attracts groups of people will be more likely to grow. Fourth, a minimum of five percent of the community's housing units needs to be downtown. Downtowns that secure a strong population base ensure a lively downtown. Millennials and empty nesters are prime candidates for residents. The presence of urban gardens, recreational facilities, and cultural restaurants meets some of their needs. Fifth, new immigrants to the United States can become key candidates for revitalizing downtown. Immigrants in pursuit of living the American dream may possess and model the strong work ethic required to revitalize a downtown. Those with construction trade skills can aid with re-purposing vacant housing and factories. Sixth, commerce should cultivate functional diversity with retail, dining, and

entertainment establishments. Multifunctional districts need to offer a mix of residential, retail (8% of retail should be located downtown), office, civic, cultural, and entertainment venues. The diverse functions ensure consistent activity, which increases the sense of safety. Seventh, recognizing the importance of history, the community's heritage should be leveraged. Downtowns hold the highest concentration of a city's historical buildings. Active preservation efforts can attract visitors and increase community pride. Eighth, stakeholders should develop a catalyst project that stimulates activity and energy amongst the residents. A visible project can catapult revitalization, and provide the energy needed to have immediate impact for community vision. Examples include the Peace Center for Performing Arts in Greenville, South Carolina (Greenville, n.d.) and Charlottesville, Virginia's pedestrian mall (Charlottesville, n.d.). Ninth, it is critical to create quality public places. Sidewalk cafes, public plazas, and exquisite alleys are examples of public places that attract businesses and residents. Quality public places become connectors, which enhance the sense of community. Finally, in order to rally the type of energy necessary for revitalization, a champion, a key person (or group) who sets the tempo for the community, should lead the charge. The presence of one linchpin in the community who is able to mobilize community members toward a unified vision is critical. The Ford family in Wabash, Indiana is an example of a family whose generosity and vision has created a revitalized downtown destination for entertainment and dining.

These ten strategies are tangible actions to pursue. While there is evidence of cities exhibiting these attributes, how can they be applied to a small town that has struggled for many years with multiple attempts to spark entrepreneurship? Further, how do small towns apply them when population projection indicates even further decreases?

Large Cities with Universities

Large cities across the nation house multiple campuses in urban areas. New York City boasts thirty-five colleges and universities in multiple locations with sub-campuses (ny.com, n.d.). For the purposes of this study, three large cities, population 50,000+, with three campuses that have specific initiatives impacting the urban landscape are discussed.

On the website home page for The University of Colorado in Denver (UC-D), there is this statement: "The City is our Campus" (UCDenver, 2016). Such a comment reveals cohesion, or a blurring of the lines, between the city and campus. Denver, a central location, makes it easy for adults to attend classes near their place of work. UC-D's Business School was formerly located in fifteen different locations and is now merged into one location called Experiential Learning Center. The center provides easy access to businesses, entrepreneurial startups, Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits and other internship opportunities. Interestingly, efforts by UC-D to turn their face toward the city by crossing the boundaries of campus and public sector were the catalyst for success.

UC-D's School of Architecture and the College of Liberal Arts also combined into one building and is housed downtown (see Figure 6; UCDenver, 2016). The building's facade appears as office buildings rather than an academic facility. It is designed for collaboration so that students and faculty can easily meet for coffee. The downtown location also allows business professionals to have easy access to individuals who write and think well, creating a mutual exchange of skill sets, a benefit for both the academy and city (Caley, 2013). UC-D banners highlight efforts toward branding the downtown. Also, an annual block party welcoming students, faculty, staff, and downtown

businesses continues efforts to build positive relationships between the community and academy (Caley, 2013).

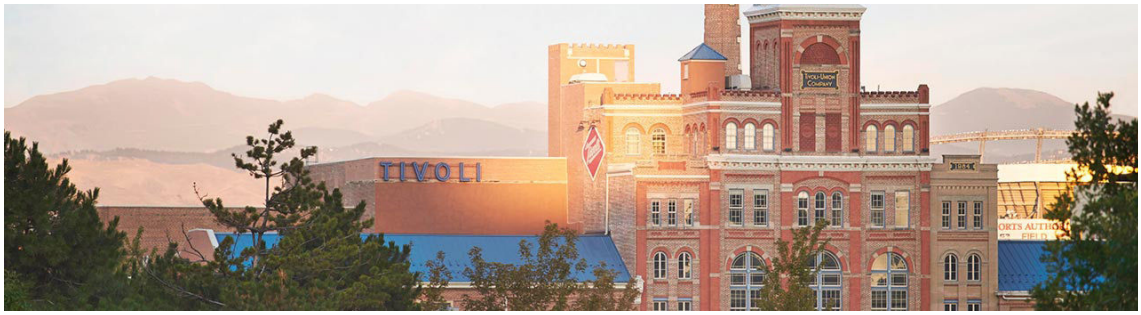

Figure 6. University of Colorado-Denver

The University of Utah's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) relocated to Salt Lake City's downtown from the main campus in 2014. The donated building has opened the door for "community facing" events such as the World Leaders Lecture Forum (David Eccles, 2016). The third floor ballroom hosts community gatherings. The university leadership understands that the change will not be easy but is allowing for growth and community engagement (see Figure 7; Wallace, 2014).

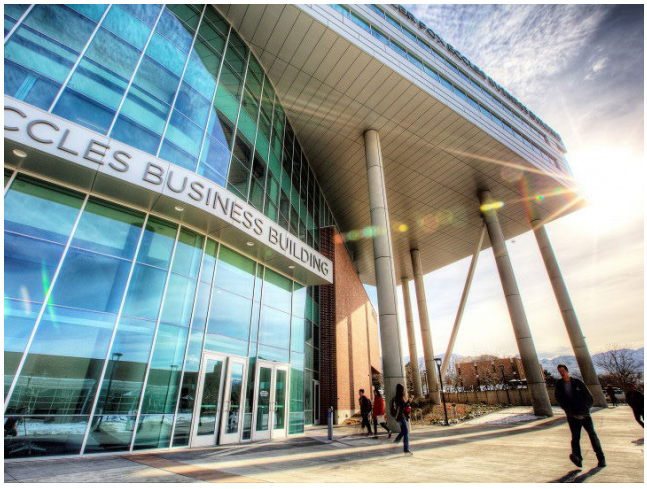

Figure 7. University of Utah, Salt Lake City

With universities increasing their interest in community engagement, academic libraries are getting involved in the conversation. With the demand for Internet accessibility, the lines have blurred between public and university libraries. The University of Toronto's (Canada) library outreach programs have partnered with public institutes and academic units across the university to deliver outreach activities connecting the university with the public. Rhetoric such as "global impact," "knowledge transfer," and "partner in society" are found more readily in university mission statements (Leong, 2013). The library is the ideal platform for accomplishing activities to avoid the "ivory tower syndrome" that academic elites perpetuate (Blunt, 1999). Seminars, panel discussions, conferences, and book launches are activities that can merge the academic and public in a mutually engaging dialogue (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. University of Toronto's (Canada) library

In summary, universities are gaining large footprints in the urban landscape which helps prompt revitalization efforts of blighted areas for cities. Urban locations for various majors within universities (i.e., business, architecture, and library science) aid academies in providing a dynamic and real-life education for their students. Yet, it is still unclear how universities in smaller urban centers influence the revitalization process.

Small Towns And Universities

The majority of cities in America (97%) have 50,000 residents or fewer (Ofori-Amoah, 2007). Several of these small cities have journeyed through the revitalization tunnel. Their experiences offer insight for urban centers closer to the demographics of Marion, Indiana.

In his article, "Can Small City Downtowns Remain Viable," Robertson (1999) addressed key topics in revitalization that small cities grapple with. Although the author did not mention university integration, his survey of communities such as Wausau, Wisconsin and Bangor, Maine itemized common struggles. The 'clear or moderate problems' were: (1) how to attract new developments (i.e., tax breaks for conducting business in an enterprise zone, (2) how to attract people to the downtown area on evenings and weekends (i.e., cultural events), and (3) how to deal with competition from discount stores and/or suburban malls (i.e., specialty stores). Common minor problems within small cities were: unattractive or aging building facades, crime or the perception of an unsafe environment, lack of public transportation or lacking walkability, poor traffic circulation causing frequent congestion and inconvenience, and the lack of organization addressing downtown interests between the stakeholders.

Robertson (1999) also mentioned the landscape in the downtown of small towns hold significant stories of the past. Hence, an important priority for small cities is the preservation of architecture and heritage in this area. And, the most successful development strategies include using a main street approach (central street hub), new office development, waterfront development, and a convention center. Interestingly,

creating a “sense of place” was ranked the most important strategy for downtown revitalization.

An important case study in small town/university collaboration for revitalization is the initiative by Mount Vernon Nazarene University in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Mount Vernon (14,400 population), the economic and social hub of Knox County (population 54,500), is located northeast of Columbus, Ohio. The city’s birth in 1805 held railroad access; its growth was dependent on agricultural machinery and turbines. Mineral excavation and glass industry were added to the economy in the 20th century. The median income is below the average of the state of Ohio at $38,877 per household (Ofori-Amoah, 2007).

Mount Vernon’s downtown is situated around a public square. At the time of the study (2007), 35% of the buildings were in good condition, 55% in fair condition, and 10% in poor condition. Of the 107 buildings, 98 were occupied by 141 businesses with six building’s first floors vacant (6% vacancy on first floors). In 1960, the downtown was the only retail location for the city. In 2000, 54 retail stores remained downtown. Most specialty stores claimed a customer base of more than 50% from outside the county (Ofori-Amoah, 2007). Efforts for improvements date back to 1970; these initiatives were from the Heritage Center Association, the Knox County Chamber of Commerce, Knox County Convention Visitors Bureau, and the Mount Vernon Parking Company. Grants contributed to building rehabilitation and streetscape improvements. Events such as antique festivals and leveraging the cultural facilities such as the Woodward Opera House, the oldest authentic 19th century theater in the United States, have contributed to revitalization efforts.

In 2009, Mount Vernon University (MVU) moved the entire Art department to a refurbished historic building in downtown Mount Vernon called the Buchwald Center (see Figure 9; Mount Vernon, 2016). The contribution of the vacant building by a single donor paved the way for crossing the threshold of university presence in downtown. Following the move by the Art department, the Nursing department developed an adjacent building. Eventually, the MVU owned the entire block, which now houses shops and services for the community. On a pivotal corner one block from the Buchwald Center, an old hotel was purchased by the original donor of the art building. After deeming the building too costly to renovate, the building was torn down and a brand new hotel was constructed in the architectural style of the original. The luxury hotel now services the city while benefiting the university.

Figure 9. Buchwald Center, Mount Vernon, Ohio

Recently, Kenyon College announced the transition of the some academic programs and a community engagement office to Mount Vernon's downtown. A three-story, 18,000 square-foot building renovation opened the door for a downtown location

directly across from MVU (see Figure 10). The project represents a convergence of education in a small downtown. It could be assumed Kenyon's decision to move to the downtown was in part influenced by Mount Vernon's efforts ("A Move to Main Street", 2015).

Figure 10. Future Kenyon College Downtown location, Mount Vernon, Ohio

In summary, small cities have similar aspirations to those of large cities – revitalization of blighted areas in their communities. Small cities experience common struggles in their revitalization journey. Several success stories offer ideas and hope for communities just beginning the process. As mentioned with universities in large cities, overt efforts by universities that turn their face toward the city have significant impact. Yet, what is still unknown is how the revitalization of small cities with universities proceeds without upfront financial resources.

Contributions to Successful Revitalization

Complete solutions for revitalization of a city's downtown require action on multiple fronts. No single strategy guarantees success (Arendt, 2015). The following are several contributions that aided in creating successful revitalization outcomes. Specific towns where successful solutions transpired are included in the discussion.

Infill and pintal. Infill buildings are new architectural structures built for the purpose of filling in vacant city lots according to a prescribed street layout or comparable

infrastructure armature (Arendt, 2015). A single structure sandwiched between two buildings that were formerly attached to the building that was destroyed is called pintal (see Figure 11; Rowe & Kan, 2014). The university's participation with infill architecture for housing purposes has the potential for impacting the negative effects of blight by blending contemporary structures with historic buildings, providing a unique impact on the urban landscape. For example, Miami, Ohio's initiative of a dozen new mixed-use, multistory infill buildings located downtown housed Miami University students (Arendt, 2015). The initiative increased downtown populations, adding to the vibrancy of the city.

Figure 11. Pintal building

Safety. Safety for students and other community members using the downtown square becomes a critical issue. The New Hampshire Institute of Art (NHIA) located in downtown Manchester is going through a rebranding of its institution. As leadership planned for the future, they asked the students what their main concerns were. The topic of safety rose to the top of the list (NH Institute, 2015).

The downtown must feel safe in order to attract people to the area. In the past 20 years, NHIA, in partnership with the University of New Hampshire, has played a part in

the revitalization of Manchester's downtown. The partnership between the two universities complemented the efforts for vitality and growth. Due to the increased vibrancy and activity, safety increased for the students (Perry & Wiewel, 2005). The presence of people with energy and activity changed perception from 'vacant and mysterious' to 'full and friendly.'

Physical configurations. A city's downtown landscape can be comprised of multiple configurations. Common arrangements are: (1) a courthouse square with the courthouse located on a central downtown block (see Figure 12), (2) a multi-block configuration with several city blocks forming the center of the city, (3) a cruciform plan with a cross section as the central downtown crossroads, and (4) a stem forming a linear configuration, often with one street as the basis for the downtown. Historically, the courthouse square generates the most pedestrian traffic (Arendt, 2005). It provides the best visibility from all sides of the square; it is easily accessible, and the steady traffic around the courthouse ensures some activity is present on a regular basis.

Figure 12. Marion Courthouse on the downtown square

Art contributes to revitalization. The ease of visibility on a downtown square provides a prime backdrop for public art. Public art can be a contributor toward the revitalization of a downtown. For instance, Sheridan, Wyoming (population 17,444) displays twenty to thirty sculptures on loan from artists located all over the country (Arendt, 2015). The mayor formed a public arts committee with the sole mission being to select and promote art for the central plaza called Grinnell. The committee requested proposals from the public and received 60 submissions from 48 artists. Eight sculptures were selected for Grinnell Plaza. Since then, Sheridan has installed 59 permanent works of art along with pieces on loan (Sheridan Public Arts, n.d.).

In Amherst, Massachusetts, Evan Plotkin, president of NAI Global (a global commercial real estate brokerage firm), converted a single floor in the downtown area from a dark space into an activated space, a permanent art gallery for the University of Massachusetts. He was able to display framed two-dimensional art that formerly was leaning against walls, sometimes back to back. The art added to the ninth floor footprint served as a conduit to transform space that can now be used for events and fund-raising initiatives. This opened the doors for collaborative efforts with area schools and learning opportunities for youth; its presence provides a place for other artists to work and live downtown and has the potential for leading to larger projects of collaboration between the downtown and the University of Massachusetts Amherst (Obrien, 2012).

The arts are increasing in their importance in urban community and economic development. The ability to develop areas of inclusion and openness encourages participation in the shaping of life, regardless of what age, ethnic group, or educational level. A key to the merging of art offerings and citizens of a small community in a

downtown space is creative place making (the intentional development of public or private spaces that enhance human interaction).

The National Endowment for the Arts has placed emphasis on arts-centered initiatives aimed toward strengthening economies and enlivening surrounding neighborhoods. Projects increase diversity and an environment of mutual respect. Art-based strategies aid in developing social imagination and a sense of community (Dewey, 1980).

When examining key characteristics in efforts to merge academy goals and local downtown efforts, it is important to note the necessary characteristics from both parties. In a letter to the presidents and chancellors of universities and land-grant colleges from the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, seven characteristics were deemed necessary (Blunt, 1999). First, there must be a clear commitment to the basic idea of engagement. Communication is critical for a mutuality that is sustainable. Second, a strong support for infusing engagement into curriculum and teaching mission is necessary. Faculty and administration should create a foundation of accountability toward a trajectory of community engagement. Third, remarkable diversity in approaches and efforts must be pursued. The stakeholders should be sourced from varying sectors of the community to draw upon its diverse population. Fourth, "community" must be defined. Differing views without clarity could risk a misunderstanding of the goals. Fifth, leadership is critical. Engaged leaders who are able to empathize with a broad base of individuals will leverage resources. Sixth, funding is always an issue. The resources available determine the path toward meeting the goals. Finally, accountability needs to be lodged in the right place. Short cuts for the purpose of

quick monetary gain toward a good cause are never a good idea (Blunt, 1999). These critical attributes, when working in tandem, have the potential for ensuring progressive improvements in a congenial context with all of the stakeholders.

Accomplishments and Gaps

It is apparent that effective and successful revitalization has many facets. Each one must be cloaked in the principle of a heightened sense of place (Robertson, 1999). Historically, cultural and civic engagement has been necessary to successfully respond to economic or societal shifts for downtown districts. Attracting generations such as the Baby Boomers and Millennials is critical to downtown revitalization.

In large cities, the university must turn its face toward the city by blurring the lines of investment between university and community events and spaces. In small cities, the pursuit of donors who have loyalty toward the city can benefit the university in their efforts toward community engagement.

Regarding contributions to successful revitalization, infills can diversify the downtown by blending contemporary architecture with historic structures. Safety is critical for public perception, the physical form of the downtown should be leveraged, and the arts are increasing in their importance for the revitalization of downtowns.

The aforementioned contributions promote high-density levels of activity, emphasize historic preservation, maintain and develop civic public places, reject the tendency to "suburbanize" the downtown, develop and enforce strict design controls, do not underestimate the importance of street-level activity, and plan for a multifunctional downtown. And, key policy implications were revealed in the case studies of small towns, which are critical to the present study. They stress the importance of building a

strong public/private partnership, understanding healthy downtowns are multifunctional, building on the assets of successful downtowns, and establishing a distinctive sense of place (Robertson, 1999).

Yet, it is important to note two key gaps in the literature. First, more work needs to be done on how universities can impact the revitalization process of small cities. There are few cases studies; those narratives tend to omit the number of years for planning, decision-making, fund raising, and deliberation required to achieve and maintain the vibrant community. While authors mention milestones of success and moments of discouragement, they often gloss over the heartbreak, sleepless nights, and failures that preceded the successful outcome. Immovable setbacks and roadblocks can make revitalization seem like an unachievable goal.

Second, new ideas for eliciting university involvement in revitalization efforts are needed. In particular, strategies to win over university administrators are missing; procedures to convince them to participate in the revitalization process need development. The purpose of this study is to explore unique benefits the university can contribute to the revitalization of a small downtown square. Findings from the literature review support the potential for drawing on university resources as one critical source to offer hope and vibrancy to the community.

Chapter 3: Design Thinking Methodology, Results, and Discussion

Design thinking methods of research were conducted by the author and assisted by another faculty member and fifteen undergraduate students over a three month period with Marion residents ranging between ages eighteen and one hundred. Professors working alongside undergraduate design students and employing design-thinking methodology created an immersive educational opportunity. Collaborative design thinking methods employed with a wide range of participants during multiple sessions evoked insightful results about the existing conditions of Marion along with creative solutions for future revitalization efforts. A thorough information-gathering process was required for the goals of this research project.

While traditional research would reveal helpful information, non-traditional methodology proved to be more empathic and meaningful. Yet, the two forms of research worked in contrast to one another and partnered effectively for the purposes of this study. The traditional methods typically required individual work, while the non-traditional Design Thinking methods were interactive, requiring multiple individuals' participation. To keep the comprehensive information organized between all seventeen designers throughout the entire process, the online platform Basecamp was utilized for storing information, planning events, and group communication (see Figure 13).

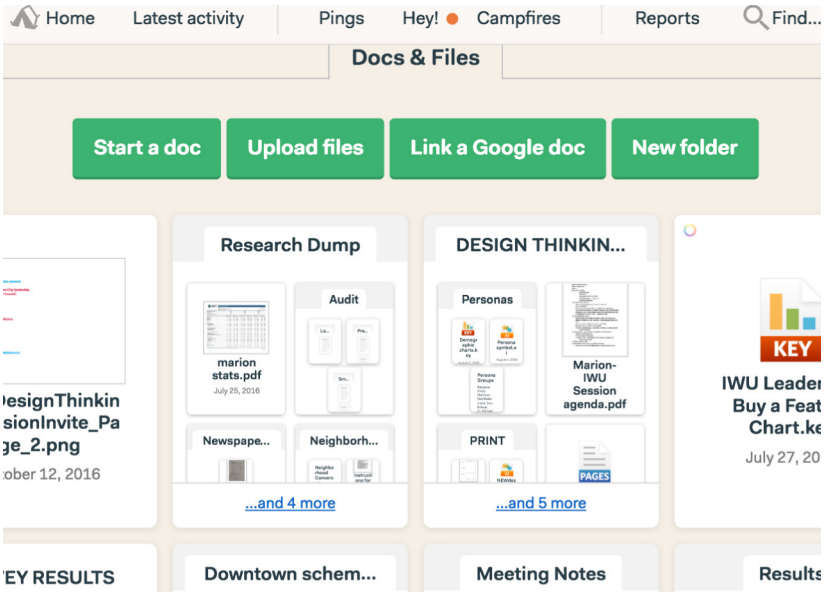

Figure 13. Basecamp platform

Execution as Learning

Designers can utilize various models of execution in projects; examples include Execution-as-Learning (see Figure 14) or Execution-as-Efficiency. The latter is the traditional organization of leadership of top down execution. In the former approach, leaders are facilitators who ensure the team is headed in the right direction. The team discovers the "how to" answers. Change is constant and feedback moves in two directions, not only from the leadership, but also from the team (Edmunson, 2012).

Figure 14. Execution as Learning Diagram

The Execution-as-Learning model was applied to the research process for this project. As a result, the faculty and undergraduate students developed a new method of creative freedom. Selfish tactics of rank and title were dispelled. Facing the fear of the unknown and inadequacy by the faculty and students eventually provided a safe, collaborative environment as they worked together to face the challenges. As faculty, I found myself in a place of unique vulnerability that allowed a relationship with the students that freed me up to fail successfully.

Immersive Learning

The hope for the immersive experience with Marion was to reveal new opportunities to reach deep into the complacency of economic stagnation and the bland cultural facade to emerge with a renewed vision for a vibrant community. The interaction with community members revealed a hope for change that was blanketed in tiredness from efforts that lay stagnant. Seven months prior to the commencement of our research,

a new mayoral administration moved into office. The mayor's early work was fraught with discoveries of debt and mismanagement from the previous administration. In spite of the burden, he freely engaged in discussions of future revitalization. We met with him on many occasions, and during the months of engagement, a trust developed so that now we are periodically consulted by the administration regarding the temperature of the community. An immersive effort can develop meaningful trust in relationships.

The learning platform was created with tools drawn from design thinking methodology and conducted in the context of three main categories: looking, understanding, and making (see Figure 15). The duration of each grouping of strategies varied based on the number of participants, type of activity, resources, participants' responsibilities, time availability, and project needs. Flexibility was critical throughout the entire process, keeping in mind the end goal while providing an appropriate atmosphere of freedom during each phase. The first meeting with the design team set an atmosphere of freedom among the design team (see Figure 16). Due to the complex, collaborative nature of the project, several methods of research occurred simultaneously. Investigation of the current state of the city began through extensive online research, attempting to gain an understanding of the identity of the city.

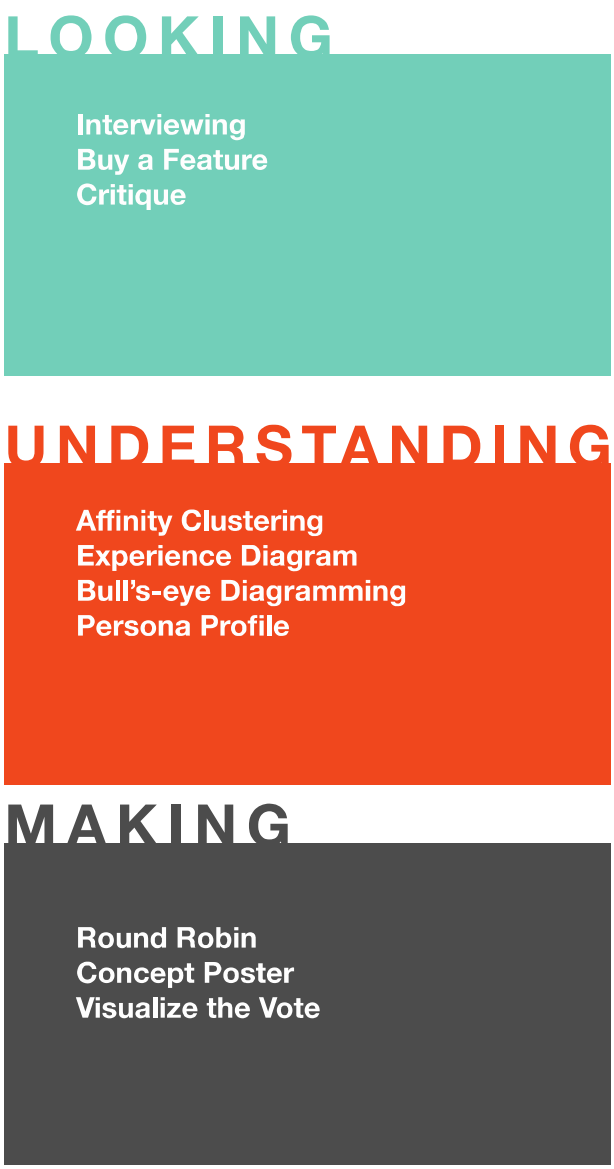

Figure 15. Design Thinking method

Figure 16. First meeting with the design team

Presence Changes Perception

To maximize experience in a three-month period, it was critical that we develop a presence in the downtown square. In order to precisely understand the culture, seeing "from the inside out" was vital as opposed to looking "from the outside in." The Indiana Wesleyan University campus is four miles from the downtown square. If we had conducted our research from campus, our remote perception would minimize full engagement and necessary visibility for the community. Our hope was to secure a location that could serve as easy access where individuals from the community could walk in during regular 9:00 am to 5:00 pm work hours to converse with the designers, faculty and students.

Moneyless, we began an adventure of witnessing acts of generosity by groups and individuals in the community. The leader of a local community organization contacted a member of the county council who owned the vacant Salin Bank on the corner of the downtown square. They agreed to meet us at the bank and give us a tour of the facility.

Within a four-hour time span, from the first phone call to receiving of the building keys, the facility was ours to conduct research on the most visible property on the square at the expense of the county. And, the city agreed to pay for Internet access, providing a key component for conducting research.

A Sense of Place

The vision was to create a place of hospitality in the bank with a large "family table" where we could serve meals to guests as we engaged them during interviews and other activities for our research. We had no money or outside resources, so we began exploring the two-story building. A twenty-foot long oak table was found on the second floor along with dozens of chairs. The table would soon serve as a form of "welcoming arms" to everyone who entered the building. We carefully loaded the table on our backs, carried it down the stairs, and placed it in the center of the bank lobby as the central gathering place. It magically accommodated small and large groups without sacrificing intimacy or accessibility (see Figure 17). Glass partitions that played the white board role, teller stations that acted as food service counters, and smaller offices that acted as collaboration spaces surrounded the lobby. It is a space that grew into an active, exciting plethora of visual data, text, sketching, and iconography.

Figure 17. First community gathering in the bank

Marion Design Co

It was critical for building relationships with the community that we represent ourselves as citizens of the city first and foremost. We believed a precedent of partnership rather than hierarchy would be more prudent; the hope was to come alongside the community rather than step into the community from the outside. Hence, we labeled ourselves Marion Design Co (MDCo). This enabled us to introduce ourselves as designers and creative leads, instead of faculty and students of Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU).

On the first week of research, we met at the bank, created teams, and devised a plan. While organization was absolutely necessary, we soon realized that during the convergent and divergent design work process, methodology does not often fit in the neat package of a linear framework. Process got messy and chaotic. We had to learn to adjust to the discoveries that would throw off the plan and push us in a more appropriate direction than we had originally anticipated.

While some traditional research methods were conducted as preliminary investigation of the subject matter, such as precedent studies, literature review, and historic research, the innovative methodology for the body of work followed Design Thinking strategies (see Figure 18; Curedale, 2016). These strategies allowed for stakeholder engagement with the hope of a more empathetic outcome.

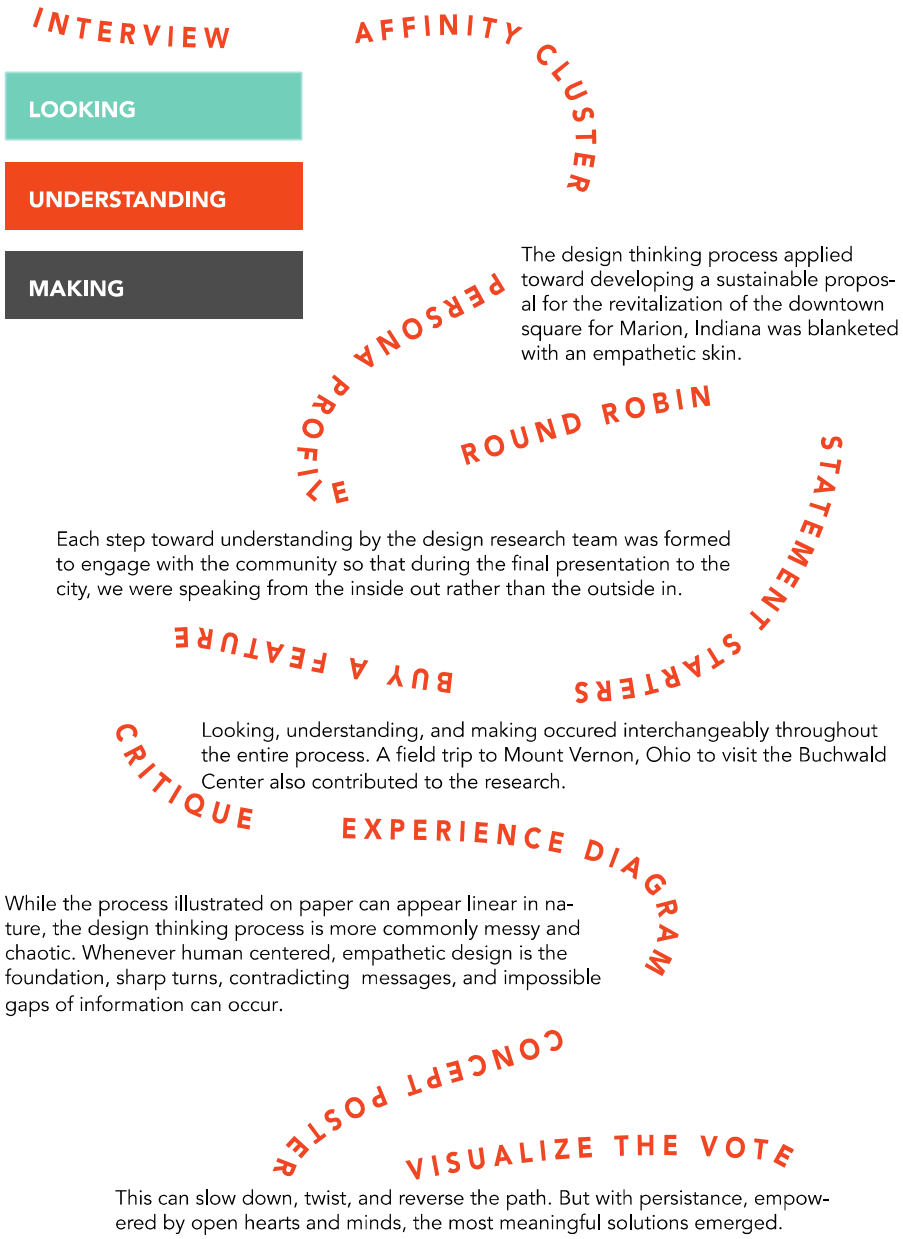

Figure 18. Design Methodology

Research on the history of Marion laid the groundwork of understanding as we prepared for the first gathering with the first group of participants. Most of the students were not from the local area and needed to familiarize themselves with the current conditions. Demographic research on the Internet aided in the initial investigation.

For three months, during the meetings at the bank, community leaders informally walked into the building to meet us and began sharing their thoughts about the city and their hopes for our influence. Artists, politicians, business owners, retirees, and volunteers sat at our twenty-foot table. We listened to their stories. We asked questions to deepen our understanding. We were already getting a sense of the heart of the community through these early interviews, but we had to be careful to remain open-minded without making assumptions and drawing conclusions too quickly.

Experience Map: Lunch in Downtown Marion

To grasp the culture surrounding the courthouse square, we conducted an Experience Map (see Figure 19). Another useful tool is Experience Diagramming, which may be used to chart the experience of a stakeholder in the downtown area. This method uses a visual format to explore a person's experience in detail. Persona Profiles may serve as the participants of the experience. For this project, this method may include documenting the current experience for a stakeholder in Marion's downtown square and later documenting the stakeholder's experience in the context of the proposed revitalized downtown square. One task was to record our first attempt to eat lunch downtown in the middle of our workday. On a Monday, six designers walked out the front door of the bank, our downtown studio, and headed to a new cafe one block away. We tugged the locked doors. The sign in the window indicated they were closed on Mondays. We then

walked back to our parking lot to get in the car to drive to a restaurant because there were no other options within walking distance of the square. We drove to a pizza parlor just over a mile away and found their doors locked as well. Apparently, it had the same Monday closed policy. We finally ended up at a Chinese restaurant and were served less than average food. It was disappointing and a new discovery.

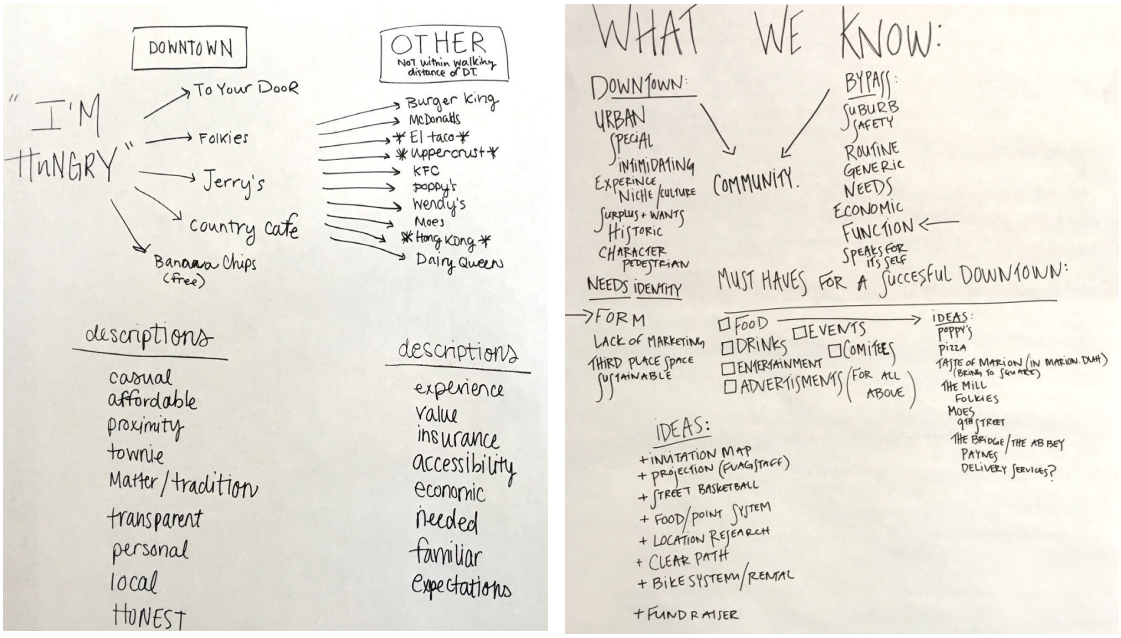

Figure 19. Experience Map and Comparison Analysis of Downtown and the Bypass

When we returned to our studio, we recorded our experience with the Experience Map. We discussed all of the options that one might pursue in an effort to eat lunch on a weekday in downtown Marion. The options pulled us toward the Bypass; it is a main thoroughfare that is referred to by a variety of names: SR9, SR18, SR15, Martin Luther King Drive, and Baldwin. There are several fast food restaurants, chain stores (e.g., Walmart, Meijer, Dollar General), used car dealerships, and the North Park Mall, which has lost its key anchor stores in recent years.

From the exercise, we recognized the Bypass has its own distinct characteristics that are critical to the vibrancy of Marion. It is home to familiar chains that residents depend on. In contrast, the downtown has a historic, unique character that can be highlighted, providing a different experience and purpose for Marion residents. We concluded that our fight for the downtown was not against the Bypass. This brought about a different appreciation for the two entities. For the duration of this research project, we frequented restaurants on the Bypass for lunches with the highlight being Moe's Monday offering five-dollar burritos.

Affinity Clusters and Interviews: The Community

After a week of getting settled and conducting precedent studies and research about Marion, an encounter at a local coffee shop led to the first application of community-engaged design thinking research. I struck up a conversation with an influential, retired business owner and described to him the research we were conducting at the bank. He explained that he meets with a group of men who call themselves the Fossils. They gather weekly for lunch at various restaurants in the area. He was willing to bring pizza for the research team and invite the men to share in a meal with us in order to participate in the research. This first gesture of generosity began the process of gathering over meals with a variety of people from the community for the purpose of learning more about Marion.

The Fossils, who varied in ages from early forties to late eighties, arrived and sat at our long table. We had thirty-five people gathered, actively passing plates, serving pizza, and conversing. The ambience was thrilling. Designers and creative leads were asking questions of the men and their responses were revealing and genuine. The stories

repeated a common theme of a history of local prosperity turned to blight. A community that was once thriving with the manufacturing industry was now identified as dormant from the loss of industry jobs in spite of a smattering of attempts to revitalize the economy. In an effort to fix the problem of the loss of industry jobs, the local government had attempted to attract large manufacturing companies to Marion.

Once the conversation died down and lunch was consumed, I directed everyone's attention to the large panel of glass that was plastered with white poster paper. We explained the purpose of the Affinity Clustering method of research. Affinity Clustering is a form of Mind Map exercise. The participants complete a type of mix and match process to find similar themes repeated in the words or phrases that emerge from the first rapid fire process of initial responsive thoughts to the topic posed.

Everyone received a pad of sticky notes and a black marker. Each Fossil was asked to respond to the statement: What is one word that describes Marion to you? They were given instructions to write one word on each sticky note that came to mind when they thought of Marion. As the men began writing, the student-designers assisted them by retrieving the notes and placing them on the white paper in random order. When the notes had all been gathered, we asked the men to approach the plastered white paper and group the words according to similar themes. This was a slow process for them, but the end result revealed themes of places, preferences, emotions, people groups, and historical events with a mixture of positive, neutral, and negative components.

The first session with the Fossils sparked multiple lunch interviews and Affinity Maps (see Figure 20). Interviews were conducted early on during the research phase for the purpose of gathering information about the past, present, and future. This method of

research revealed each individual's understanding of Marion's history, their perceptions of Marion at present, and their hopes for the city's future. We invited teachers, pastors, police officers, firefighters, community volunteers, undergraduates, neighborhood association presidents, business owners, government leaders, parents, the Economic Growth Council, retirees, YMCA members, hospital personnel, prosecutors, foundry workers, and university personnel. The responses from participants were personal and communal in nature. Stories of memories blanketed with a background of downtown history emerged regularly. We heard stories ranging from visits to the dentist on the seventh floor of the former Marion National Bank building to historic events citywide, such as the last lynching in the United States on the Marion courthouse lawn. Individuals were nostalgic and wishful for a different current story than what they are living now in the context of blight. Our location on the courthouse square presented a vantage point of looking at the building facades surrounding the bank mentioned in our participants' stories and recalling what thriving businesses they once housed. Again, we were constantly reminded of the critical nature of our presence. In Figure 21, the words revealed from the Affinity Maps and how frequently each was mentioned are documented. There are sixteen categories. The first and second categories, Identified Community Ills and Positive Community Trait, are compilations of negative and positive words that were gathered together because they do not fit the other specific categories.

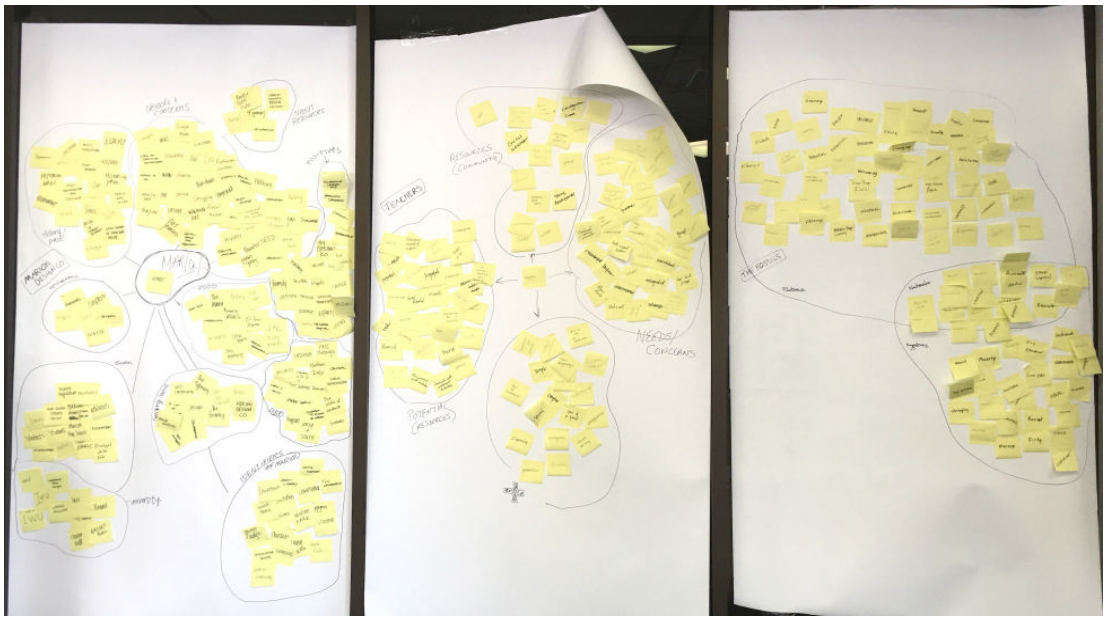

Figure 20. Affinity Clusters of law enforcement, teachers, and the Fossils

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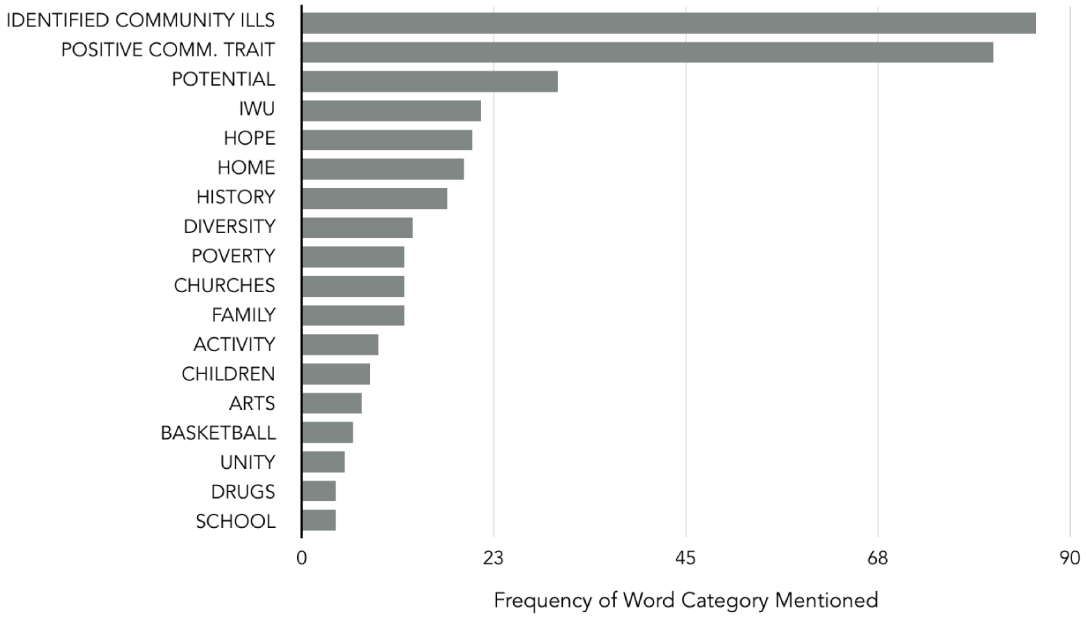

Figure 21. Frequency of words identifying Marion from the Affinity Clusters

In Figure 22, the words making up the first two compilations are revealed for comparison purposes. It is interesting to note that the positive and negative words are

equal in quantity. It was assumed by the research team that the negative terms would dominate the positive.

IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY ILLS	POSITIVE COMMUNITY TRAITS
Strongholds	Stories
Disorganized	Energetic
Beaten Down	Unique
Wrongly Portrayed	Improving
Remote Landlords	Complex
Unmotivated	Friendships
Disappointed	Work ethic
Dead	Young Professionals
Wanting Out	Community Support
Out Sourced	Loyalty
Need	Justice
Limited	Redemption
Empty	Peace
Unsure	Proud
Simple	Accepting
Sunset	Intentional
Victim	Activism
Wealth Gap	Model/Prototype
Isolated	Jobs
Rough around the edges	Change
Vacant	Nonprofits
Passivity	Entrepreneurs
Divided	Connectedness
Mistrust	Action
Confused	Possibilities
Unfocused	Accessible Leadership
Lack of collaboration	Passionate Leadership
Segregation	Gaining Momentum

Figure 22. Analysis of the Affinity Clusters – Community Ills and Positive Traits of Marion

There are a few noteworthy implications. First, the interviews associated with each Affinity Cluster exercise provided additional insight into the Identified Community Ills. In general, these words support the Broken Pane Theory: when broken windows are left unrepaired, they send a message to the public that no one cares or is in charge (Missoula, n.d.). Second, 75% of the participants were not associated with the university as an employee or student. Yet, the comments about IWU were predominantly positive about the university. For instance, "IWU is more involved in the community than you would think; the campus is the 'mecca' in the middle of a desert; and 350 million "dollars" worth of buildings has been built on campus in ten years." Basically, participants painted the university as a key participant in the revitalization of the downtown; its involvement is perceived as critical to success. Interestingly, there was one negative comment – "IWU does not pay taxes, so why do we give them all this stuff?" The person was referring to the tax breaks that the university receives as a not-for-profit organization.

Last, between the meetings involving Affinity Clusters, Marion Design Co members were frequently afforded opportunities to serve the Marion community. For instance, we assisted with planting flowers in the large pots along the sidewalks of the courthouse square. There is no city labor support for beautification; everything is volunteer-driven. Simple beautification efforts are initiated by individuals who care about the city. For us, this interaction with community volunteers was meaningful; our empathy for the city grew immensely.

Problem Statement

As we collected data that reinforced reoccurring themes, a problem statement was carefully crafted. We argued that Marion is rich with resources that are not being recognized and utilized effectively. Listening to the heart of this city's citizens, we also heard of a hope that has remained stagnant for decades. Gathering information through design thinking methods of engagement in partnership with historical research of Marion enabled us to conclude with the following problem statement to springboard further research. The problem statement is: Marion is home to a full and capable community that is misperceived, segmented, and under-realized.

Persona Profile and Round Robin: People Downtown

The Persona Profile and Round Robin strategies were used on two separate occasions during our research. The first occasion was with twelve Marion Design Co design students; the second was with university leadership and the mayor's cabinet. The latter will be discussed later.

Persona Profile (see Figure 23) is a method used to enhance the participant's empathy. A fictional person was developed by a team of individuals based on characteristics of someone who might represent a person in Marion's demographics. This method was used in two phases of the research. During early phases, personas were created after completing interviews and affinity clusters along with other exploratory research, such as riding the city's bus system and observing the neighborhoods. The persona is given a name, a biological description, common attitudes, and a list of needs and goals. During Design Thinking strategy stage one, the persona profiles were created proportionately to the racial make-up of Marion. During Design Thinking strategy three,

The Personas were created from ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute) data provided by the city (ESRI, 2016).

Figure 23. Example of a Persona Profile

In the first month of research, the team of design researchers divided into three groups of four individuals whose task began with riding the city bus. Each group took one of three different routes. We wanted to use this immersive experience for the development of personas.

Three personas were created; each one was based on the students' observations on the bus rides combined with their research of Marion's demographics. We named the personas George, Pablo, and Brenda (see Figure 24 for an example of a Persona Profile). In general, the personas represent three different ethnic groups in Marion and a variety of age groups. Discussion about the personas and their attributes was conducted before moving forward to create Round Robin ideation. Interestingly, a few of the design students perceived the process as making narrow assumptions about people.

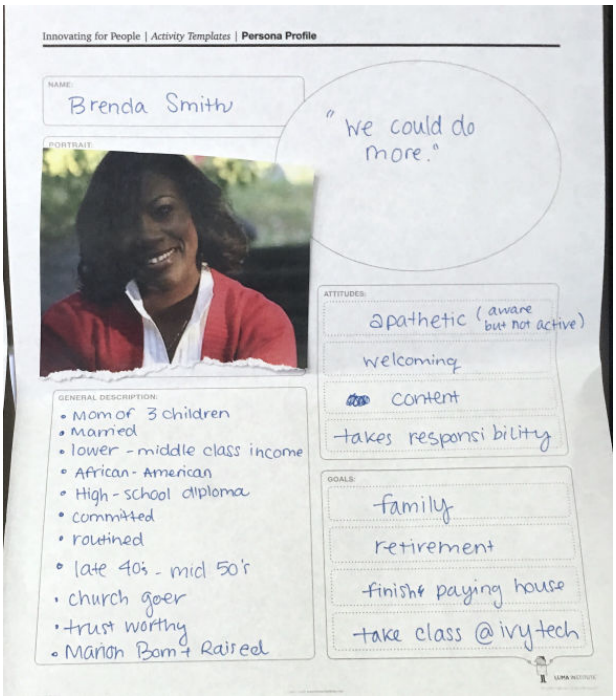

Figure 24. Brenda Smith Persona Profile

The Round Robin was a creative activity for the student designers. Using a worksheet, (see Appendix A), a small team of designers work together during the Round Robin exercise. Each person is given a worksheet with four separate parts. The first person is to develop an unconventional idea in response to a proposed need and write it in the first section of the worksheet. They are then asked to pass the worksheet to the person on the left. That person is to list all of the reasons the idea would fail. After passing the sheet one more time, the next person is to write a solution to resolve the failures. Using this method, the statement this project will address is, "I want a place in the downtown square that will feel like community." The students were placed into three groups, each group representing one of the personas. Members of each group were given a Round Robin template and a set of verbal instructions. A timer was set and the first few moments were spent creating an imaginative idea for a space downtown that the persona

would prefer. Every person in the group wrote out ideas; no verbal discussions were allowed. This was an important aspect in the process already because those participants who might not typically express extravagant ideas verbally were able to write out their ideas with more freedom. After a few minutes, the members were instructed to pass their papers to the person on the right. Each person now had someone else's Round Robin paper with his or her creative idea written in the first blank. They were instructed to list all of the reasons the idea would fail. When the time bell sounded, the papers were passed again (a third time) to a completely different member, and that person was to write out a new idea based on the previous information – a new idea from the original idea and the list of failures. Hence, at the conclusion of the exercise, there were twelve completely different ideas for new activities downtown. Examples included a food truck with an arcade that served popcorn and slushies, a minor league baseball stadium shared with IWU's team, and a farmer's market and greenhouse partnership. A critique was conducted of the revised ideas to disseminate ideas even further during this critical empathetic exercise. In a critique, a participant posts ideas in front of the team and feedback is provided to lead toward more innovative ideation. This method is applied when aspects of the problem, ideas, and new concepts are proposed. Its main purpose is to aid in vetting out problems from varying perspectives in the group. It works through problems, leading toward innovation. This method is effective when conducted in group settings and individual formats. The example ideas reveal group members utilizing local entities as resources but rethinking, through design thinking strategies, their sustainability through partnerships or funding.

The Persona Profile and Round Robin strategies partnered effectively as an empathic exercise. Each student designer's imagination placed them in the position of a created personality who might participate in the places and activities that were disseminated during the Round Robin. They were able to create with more freedom through an empathetic lens than before the exercise.

Conversations Were Changing

The university via Marion Design Co was having an impact on the city. Seventeen students and faculty in a previously vacant bank downtown engaged in conversations with community members on a daily basis; these discussions provided a platform for engagement in the heart of Marion. The public became aware and a sense of hope simmered in the air. Reporters from the local newspapers, the News Herald and Chronicle Tribune, spontaneously walked into the bank on several occasions to conduct interviews. The local radio station conducted an on-air interview. Community leaders made mention of Marion Design Co in public forums at many events. The mayor and his leadership team were asking our opinion about community decisions. Volunteer organizations were inviting us to lunch as expressions of appreciation. Citizens were randomly bringing in gifts of coffee, soda, and meals to the student designers. Individuals were coming on a daily basis to see evidence of the research that flanked the bank walls. Conversations that were previously fizzling from past efforts were being heard again.

Bulls Eye Diagram: What Are The Critical Issues?

As the research generated more and more data, we needed a platform of importance hierarchy. Each issue felt critical and it was overwhelming to consider where to start taking action. The wicked problem continued to raise its ugly head of chaos.

Utilizing the data collected, we conducted a Bull's Eye Diagram to disseminate a hierarchy of critical issues (see Figure 25). Bull's Eye Diagramming is a visual documentation process, identifying the most to least important aspects of a project. Three circles are labeled according to primary, secondary, and tertiary preferences, indicating levels of importance. For this project, the stakeholders may use this method to evaluate each new concept timeline for implementation according to an order compliant with the city's revitalization plan. Topics of blight, children, schools, jobs, history, and racism written on sticky notes peppered the concentric circles. The circles were condensed with terms so they could be shifted to a chart. The frequency of a word or its associations mentioned in the critical category determined the highest level of importance. The segregation of IWU from the city ranked highest in the eyes of the designers. This discovery guided our next steps.

Figure 25. Bull's Eye Diagram

Site Visit to Mount Vernon, Ohio

A large chunk of early precedent and literature review research included examination of cities and towns with efforts of revitalization involving a university as a key contributor. The majority of successful stories have been in larger cities with

universities located in or near the downtown hub. One previously mentioned precedent met the criteria of attributes similar to Marion and IWU's situation: Mount Vernon, Ohio, a town of 18,000 residents, is home to Mount Vernon Nazarene University, a private Christian campus of 1,778 residential students. IWU's Residential CEO had previously served on the administration at Mount Vernon and was a catalyst for moving the art division downtown. When he and Dr. Wright learned of our research, they offered to sponsor a vision trip for the design team.

We packed up a van and traveled to Mount Vernon to meet with university faculty who agreed to give us a tour of their Buchwald Art Center (see Figure 26), adjacent Nursing building, and a hotel that had recently been built for the university in the downtown area. As we drove our van through the downtown, we were immediately surprised by the active environment on a Wednesday morning. Upon entering the center, we were drawn to a coffee shop adorned with urban atmosphere. While waiting for our faculty hosts, we peppered the baristas with questions about the town, the university and the coffee shop's success. It was originally the university's food vendor, but the inability to service the culture in the evenings limited its profitability. Sold to a local owner, the business was flourishing, contributing to the energy downtown.

Figure 26. Mount Vernon's Buchwald Art Center

The day was spent with Mount Vernon art and nursing faculty, who answered our questions about the viability and challenges of housing the educational divisions off campus (see Figure 27). The facilities were contemporary and accessible. Safety was considered, with keyless entry and private offices. The environments were academically appropriate and fluid, allowing for flexible use. A storefront art gallery welcomed the public. On the day of our visit, an artist's gallery opening was featured even though the academic school year had not yet begun. This scheduling indicated that the university's event planning was integrated with the city rather than exclusively for the residential students. This shift in perspective was a key component to our research as we consider a campus downtown, understanding that the underlying intent for campus events, if located downtown, would need to span a wider stakeholder base. If the adjustment is not made, the buildings would sit vacant during the summer months, especially if no summer classes are conducted.

Figure 27. Marion design research team and Mount Vernon art and nursing faculty

We also toured the Mount Vernon Grand Hotel. This new facility was birthed by a gift from a donor to the university. The land housed a former hotel that was beyond repair. The university chose to tear it down and build a period hotel, preserving the historic culture. The Mount Vernon Grand Hotel, located across the street, just one block from the Buchwald Center, is in the heart of the city and an example of revitalization efforts that have embraced the past through new vision. Innovation has pushed stakeholders to drop barriers of competition for the purpose of success.

Since Mount Vernon moved the Art division to a downtown location, Kenyon University, another institution in the city, has developed the former Buckeye Candy & Tobacco building on Main Street to classrooms to become a hub of education for three colleges: Mount Vernon Nazarene, Kenyon University, and Central Ohio Technical College (Kenyon, 2016). Efforts by one university activated others to work collaboratively to provide a good education for their enrolled students. Restated, stakeholders from all three entities were able to see the benefits of working together to support effective student learning as one cohesive whole.

The site visit sparked a new vision for potential revitalization in Marion. The experience also supports findings in the literature. Primarily, we observed: (1) the

university operating as a catalyst for downtown revitalization (Besel & Nur, 2013), (2) multiple types of partnerships from other resources strengthen the impact of the university (Blunt, 1999), and (3) art contributes positively to downtown revitalization (Obrien, 2012). Layers of evidence continued to build as we forged ahead in our research.

Although great effort and perseverance is critical to future success, the tour of Mount Vernon provided hope for appropriate application to the unique challenges of Marion. Because IWU and Marion are twice the population of Mount Vernon Nazarene and Mount Vernon respectively, we realized that we have resources available and our visions could become reality.

Marion and IWU Leadership Design Thinking Session

Design Thinking methods of research were working. Insightful information was emerging and the collaborative nature of data collection was generating energy in the community. It was time to bring leaders together from IWU administration and Marion's mayoral cabinet to listen to one another and generate new potential for unified efforts of revitalization.

An email and post card invitation were sent out to forty people in the Mayor's Cabinet and members of the IWU Presidents' Executive Council. The date was secured with the mayor and the president before the invitations were delivered to ensure maximum attendance. The email and postcard invitations are shown in Appendix B.

Soon after the invitation was mailed, a phone call was received from the IWU President's administrative assistant inviting us to an Executive Council meeting in two weeks to conduct a fifteen minute presentation to the leaders explaining the intent of the design thinking session. As with any design thinking problem, we imagined ourselves in

their position and considered what they needed in order to anticipate the session with clarity. We decided to conduct a design thinking method with them.

Prior to the invitation of a preview of the session, one of the design students was conducting an online site analysis of the downtown and surrounding area. He knew that IWU was planning to build a new football stadium on its campus; hence, we discussed the impact on the city if the stadium was placed within walking distance from the downtown square. The conversation sparked an idea for the Executive Council presentation to conduct a Buy a Feature strategy highlighting the downtown stadium concept. The Buy a Feature method of design thinking attaches a monetary value to an innovative idea. Each stakeholder is given play money to make purchases toward features they deem valuable. Each playing card has a feature with a monetary value indicated by a price tag. They are directed to purchase the features with their play money, according to an allotted budget. This method assists with clarifying the highest valued features by the stakeholders.

We created a high-resolution image of the stadium placed adjacent to a current soccer field and the river just two blocks from the downtown square. This image would emerge on the screen behind the designers during their presentation. A game board was created with a styling format similar to Monopoly's playing cards. Each card highlighted a dollar amount and an attribute that could benefit stakeholders if the football field were in the proposed location. The attributes focused on direct benefits to the Marion community and direct benefits to the university. We purchased play money and graphically designed thin bands to hold four bundles of bills.

After we arrived to the Executive Council meeting and shook hands with each member, four student designers explained the game. The members were divided into pairs and a bundle of money and a game board was distributed to each team. As they collaboratively examined the football field concept, they were instructed to lay down a dollar amount on top of the attributes on the playing board that they deemed important within eight minutes (see Figure 28 and Figure 29).

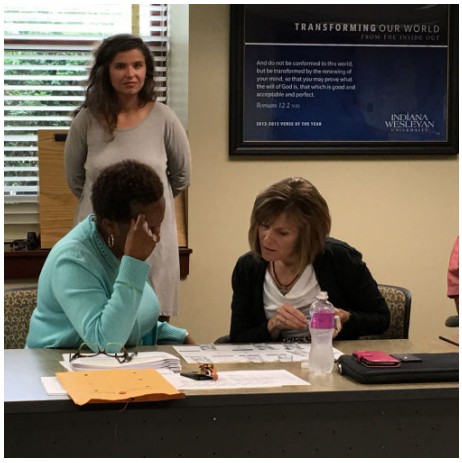

Figure 28. IWU Executive Council in Buy a Feature Strategy

Figure 29. IWU President and CEO in Buy a Feature strategy

The decision-making was collaborative. It was rewarding for the student designers to see the strategy working as leaders played a game designed to spark ideation.

After the eight minutes concluded, the game boards and money were collected and condensed onto one board to assess the total amounts distributed to the cards. The results were surprising and encouraging to the design team. The scores highlighted the importance of the Marion community as seen by the council (see Figure 30):

$118 Increase community in Marion

$104 Increase community pride

$81 Increased morale for the community

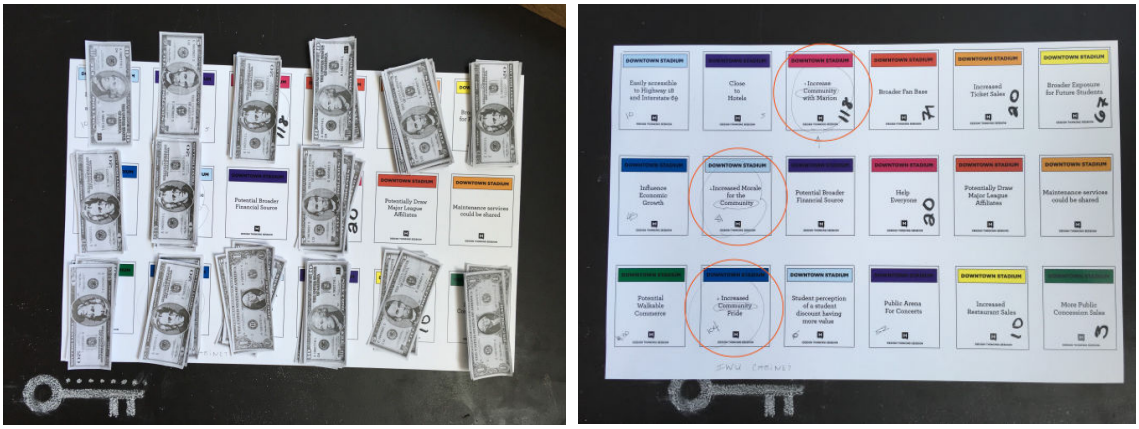

Figure 30. Buy a Feature strategy results

The executive council appeared energized by the activity and thanked us for coming. We were pleased that through this method, important data collection transpired in a short time frame.

Preparations for the four-hour design thinking session with the city and university leaders commenced. As we examined our goals for the day, it was critical that the participants felt comfortable, the atmosphere was professional, and the activities were purposeful. To set the stage for a professional atmosphere, the tools needed to be well designed. We created a packet that would hold a pamphlet with printed material explaining each activity and the tools necessary to conduct the research (see Figure 31

and Figure 32). The booklet and pamphlets are pictured in Appendix C. The nametags for each participant also served the purpose of identifying the teams with an equal number of participants from IWU and city leadership represented. The design thinking methods selected for the session were: Innovation Checkup, Persona Profile, Round Robin, Buy a Feature, Concept Poster, and Visualize the Vote. A visual sequence of the design thinking event can be found in Appendix D.

Figure 31. Preparation for Design Thinking Session

Figure 32. Activity Pamphlets

When the individuals arrived at the registration table at the bank, they were handed a nametag (see Figure 33) and booklet (see Figure 34). They were asked to sign the research waiver (see Appendix E) and given instructions to complete the Innovation Check-up (shown in Appendix C) while they mingled and enjoyed breakfast. After the participants completed their Innovation Check-up, they wrote the score from their results on the sticky note in the first pamphlet and handed it to a designer to post on the dry erase board with titles indicating the two entities present, IWU and Marion.

Figure 33. Nametags color-coded with assigned personas for the Persona Profile strategy

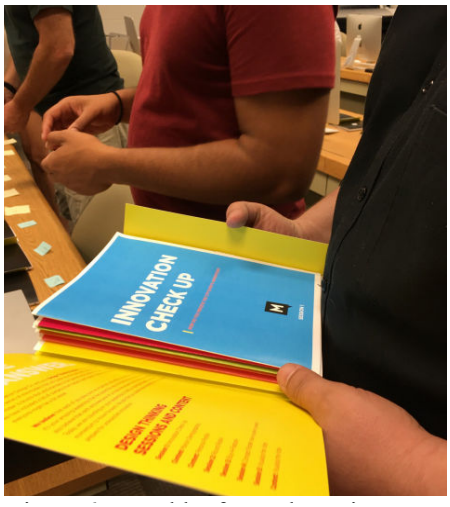

Figure 34. Booklet for each Design Thinking Session Participant

After everyone completed the check-up and ate, they were directed into the main room of the bank and seated. We welcomed everyone and introduced the schedule for the day. We announced the results of the Innovation Checkup. Both entities scored high in the assessment, indicating that they perceived their organization as highly innovative, with the university scoring six points above the city.

During our introduction explaining the purpose of the day, we shared the positive feedback we had received regarding the community's perceptions toward IWU's participation in the revitalization of downtown during our two months of data collection. The president had explained on previous occasions that he did not want to impose on the community. He expressed that this information was helpful and encouraging to him.

We introduced the designers, who were prepared to play the persona roles (see Figure 35) that would guide the activities for the day (ESRI, 2016). See Figure 36 for an example of one demographic group represented by a persona. We had nine designers lined up front and scripted to play their roles (see Figure 37). Each persona stepped forward and spoke from a first person position about their lives in Marion. History, familial makeup, career, culture, and needs were expressed. After all the personas were presented, the participants were guided toward their small group to ask further questions of the personas in order to better understand the demographic of people they represented in the city. Nine small groups had ten minutes to ask additional questions.

Figure 35. Persona profiles representing demographics of Marion

Figure 36. One demographic group represented by a persona

Figure 37. Persona Profile presentations by student designers

Remaining in the small groups, we announced the transition to the Round Robin activity. The purpose of the Round Robin was similar to what we conducted during earlier research with the designers. Each participant was to imagine an unconventional

idea for the downtown that would meet a need for the persona they had previously interviewed. The designer playing the persona remained in the group and guided the participants through the process. The Round Robin began with a Statement Starter. Statement Starter (see Figure 38) is an approach that broaches problems from a broad perspective, turning the problem into a potential idea. Sentences are proposed with spaces to fill in the blank. The participant is instructed to fill in the blanks according to their own perspective. Each starter addresses an issue the problem might pose. It is important not to embed assumptions into the statements. For this project, an example of a statement is, "What do you think would create a sense of community in the downtown square of Marion?"

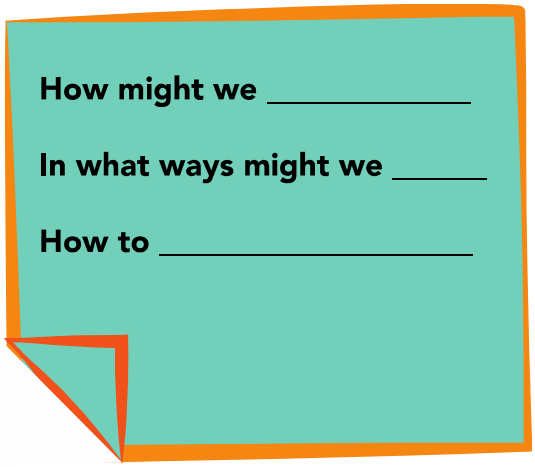

Figure 38. Statement Starters

After a few minutes, the Round Robin forms with the completed unconventional idea were passed to another member of the group for their assessment. They wrote a list of all of the reasons the idea would fail. After a short time, they were instructed to pass the form again to another member of the group who was guided to create a new idea from the original idea and the list of failures. As a result, the number of ideas equaled the

number of participants, resulting in approximately thirty-five ideas disseminated within a 45-minute time frame.

The lunch consisted of a menu of healthy street food for the purpose of introducing the type of fare that could be sold downtown. After lunch, we moved into the next phase. In order to determine the best ideas from the thirty-five created, the Buy a Feature method was applied. Materials for this method are pictured in Appendix C. Each participant had a set of five cards in their pamphlet that served as five votes. The categories of features were: current resources, launch economy, promotes health, community engagement, and entire community. This format replaced the play money and the cards with a dollar amount previously used during the session with the IWU Executive Council. What emerged from this session were seven strong ideas to push forward to the next activity. Two of the teams merged with other teams, reducing the number from nine to seven ideas.

It was critical to further the seven ideas using the participants' resources of knowledge and creativity. Therefore, each team was instructed to create a concept poster that would be presented to the entire group using the template they were provided. The Concept Poster is a format commonly used to illustrate key components for a new idea. A small team of collaborators develop a visual presentation of a new concept. This is presented in the form of a hand drawn poster that could lead to a more formalized poster. It should include a summary of the concept, key stakeholders, important features, benefits, an illustration or diagram, possibly a timeline, and draft layout for the formal poster. The Marion revitalization project poster should take into consideration the Persona Profiles developed in the previous exercise to better anticipate the user

experience. The ideas were vetted through the logistics of time, resources, community benefits, economy, and other contributors or threats to the concept. Magazine images, drawing tools, the Internet, and a printer were available to finish the poster to present to the entire group. The environment was energetic and each participant appeared engaged.

Once the concept posters were completed, everyone moved to the large group area and posted the team's sheet plastered with text, sketches, and colorful magazine images on the wall. After a few introductory comments, we asked a volunteer from each group to begin the process of presenting the team's concept poster (see Figure 39). The first team included IWU's president, the city planner, and the director of the Community Foundation. The title of their concept was Marion City College (MCC). The college would act as a living/learning community. It was also described as an urban think-tank where undergraduates would live in downtown campus housing as part of an immersion experience. This is similar to a student traveling overseas for a semester-long cultural experience. A faculty member would live in the same facility as the students. Projects for the community would be conducted in the form of work-study; students could earn money while working for the community. Persons in MCC would be eligible for reverse scholarship if they choose to stay in Marion for several years after graduation in order to pay off school tuition.

Figure 39. Concept presentations during the Design Thinking Session

The audience applauded the idea. The initial idea proposed to everyone was a direct opportunity for the university to have an immediate impact on the revitalization of the downtown square. The remaining six ideas followed suit with enthusiasm. Even if the idea did not have a direct connection to the university, each concept had the potential for emboldening the success of the next (see Appendix F).

There was one final activity called Visualize the Vote; it was included for the purpose of understanding which conceptual proposal had the strongest potential for revitalization in Marion's downtown. Visualize the Vote reveals the preferences of the stakeholders or collaborators toward proposed concepts. Each vote is indicated with a sticky note, one for an overall vote and two for a detailed vote. After the concepts have been presented, the group is instructed to independently vote simultaneously for their favorite concept. A discussion follows about which concepts were voted for and why. This method may be used in conjunction with the Concept Poster method as a form of collecting feature preferences toward innovation.

The last pamphlet in the participants' binder held five yellow sticky notes (see Appendix C). Each note was a ballot to serve as a vote toward a concept that the

individual believed could best contribute to the revitalization of downtown Marion. Everyone rose from the chairs and moved toward the posters, attaching sticky notes to the 11x17 sheets of paper representing new ideas (see Figure 40). The final activity allowed an anonymous opportunity for every participant to support his or her preference for revitalization.

Figure 40. Visualize the vote during the Design Thinking Session

At the conclusion of the voting, a summary of the day's activities and concept results was discussed (see Figure 41). While the program had concluded, many stayed and conversed about the new ideas. A fresh perspective had been generated.

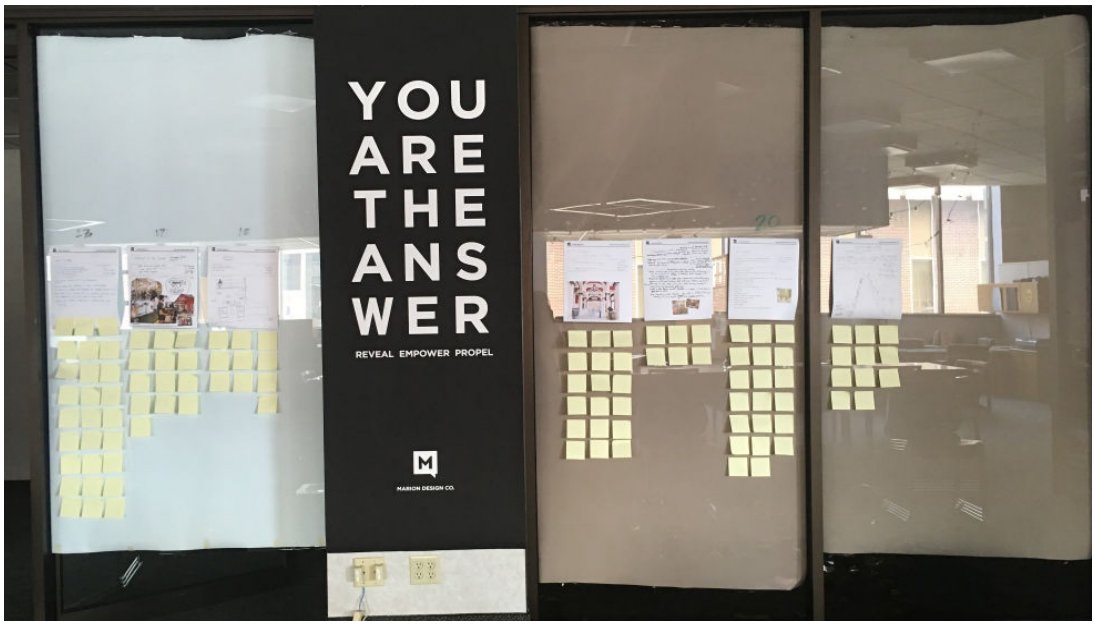

Figure 41. Results of the Design Thinking Session Visualize the Vote

It was rewarding for the research team of Marion Design Co to observe the congenial interaction and thoughtful decision-making in such a short time span by city and university leaders through the platform of Design Thinking. The process of interactive collaboration with stakeholders activated conversations that had not occurred before. Dr. Wright, president of IWU, indicated that he had never talked with city leaders in such a positive environment. We met with him along with the Residential Campus CEO one week later to discuss next steps for continuing the conversation.

He also invited us to present our research experience during the Student Spotlight Day at the upcoming Board of Trustees meeting – a bi-annual meeting with the key stakeholders for IWU. The board meeting presentation highlighted three design students who participated in the research (see Figure 42). After a brief expression of appreciation for the learning they encountered during the research, they opened the floor for questions. The first question asked was, “How can we continue the efforts that have been started?” While our agenda for this presentation was not to promote specific efforts between the

city and university, but to highlight the students' experience, the questions highlighted future collaboration. The students' answers focused on the importance of continuing Marion Design Co because of the connections bridged between the two entities, Marion and the university, for the benefit of both parties. The president expressed the importance of helping the city on many occasions during our research and the message from the students that the board of trustees heard during the presentation strengthened his platform. He recognized the impact IWU can have on Marion's successful revitalization.

Figure 42. Student designers' presentation to the IWU Board of Trustees

Limitations

Perry and Wiewel (2005) aptly remind us, "Factories have left the cities. Regional department stores have been displaced by national chains. Urban universities, however, rarely abandon their cities" (p. xi). As for Indiana Wesleyan University, its potential influence in the downtown square of Marion has been awakened. This Midwest academy is in a place of stability and has the resources to leverage a catalytic position (Besel & Nur, 2013). Furthermore, this study and future efforts between the city and university help expand the number of case studies on revitalization for small towns (Robertson, 1999).

While the present study offers new evidence, there are a few limitations. For instance, it is assumed that participants' answers were accurate and truthful. Also, other factors such as spatial aesthetics (i.e. the bank environment) and the long-term, biased relationships between participants and the administrators of Marion and IWU may have skewed the answers and the narrative given by the participants during the process. Finally, the volunteer status of the student design team appeared to impact their motivation. Attendance was sporadic; at times, there were only four students and other days there were 15 student volunteers. This slowed the research process: less was achieved on certain days. Additionally, extra time was spent on catching volunteers up on work completed when they were absent.

Conclusion

At St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota, one design faculty member, Keith Christensen, conducts community-based projects with six to eight students each semester. East St. Cloud Community Association approached Keith to help them create a sense of identity. He conducted research similar to what Marion Design Co completed at the early stage of research by asking residents for words about what was important to community member's lives. The research resulted in the creation of a logo developed in the context of students learning the value of design for the purpose of community and not money or fame (Loeb, 2010).

It is easy to design when the promised deliverable is concrete. It is more difficult when the design process takes you on a journey with no end (deliverable) in sight. The only tangible component is the new relationship that is formed during the chaos of the design process.

Sarah Little Turnbull (2012), a designer who began her career as an editorial assistant at House Beautiful, was a behind-the-scenes designer for General Mills, Procter & Gamble, and other large corporations. If she is so versed in design throughout the industry, why do so few know about her? It is because no one knew how to explain what she actually did. Marion Design Co's research felt much the same way.

The design process and outcome were best seen in the collaborative interaction between individuals whose lives connected through the city of Marion. When communities sense something new and exciting is happening, they want to be a part of it. The active generosity toward the team was demonstration of that. Often people would ask what we are working on or trying to accomplish. Our response would typically be to do research on the revitalization of Marion. Research is not often deemed as an exciting activity to participate in but this circumstance was different. The research methods were not conducted in the hallowed halls of a library but on the town square, accessible to all who were willing to participate. When discovery exposes comradeship between allies focused on doing well with all of the resources and means available, success is bound to happen (see Figure 43).

Figure 43. John Wesley quote displayed during the Design Thinking Session

Our research will continue from a base of successful, congenial relationships between the city and university. The players are engaged and a plan is being laid out. Currently, seven undergraduate student projects are being conducted for the purpose of casting vision for new businesses in vacant buildings in the downtown and neighborhood initiatives. Each entity is in line with the Marion City College concept and other ideas that were proposed.

In the coming months a second Design Thinking session will be planned between the university and city. The purpose of this gathering is to springboard off the first ideas in order to gather resources for implementation. Funding, community support, and key stakeholders will be explored in order to effectively respond with appropriate initiatives for Marion. We want to be careful to create change that is sustainable, where communication is clear, and the vision is even clearer. Indiana Wesleyan University and Marion are well on the way toward a partnership of strength and pride, recognizing that working collaboratively is much more effective than working in silos.

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Appendix A: Round Robin Form with Statement Starter

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

If the city pursued a collaborative project with I.W.U. in the downtown, launching the local economy, promoting health, and community engagement, we would create _____.

FOLD TO DOTTED LINE

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Come up with an unconventional way to address the challenge.

FOLD TO DOTTED LINE

WHY THE SOLUTION WILL FAIL

Review the proposed solution, and find a reason that it will fail.

This is your chance to be the armchair critic!

FOLD TO DOTTED LINE

FINAL CONCEPT

Review the critique. Then, quickly generate an idea that resolves the issues raised.

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Appendix B: Email and Postcard Invitations

Email invitation text:

I'd like to invite you to attend a design thinking session we've planned with a few members of the university leadership including Dr. Wright's cabinet and Mayor Alumbaugh's office.

It's designed to gather preferences and opinions and generate ideas collaboratively as we consider IWU's role in the revitalization of the city of Marion. As a designer I am researching on behalf of Marion to better understand the city's characteristics for revitalization research. Dr. Wright and Dr. Newman have visited us in the old Salin Bank building on the downtown square of Marion and understand the vision we have for helping the city improve as a benefit for all of us!

Would you please join us for this innovative session? If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me. We look forward to seeing you!

Postcard invitation:

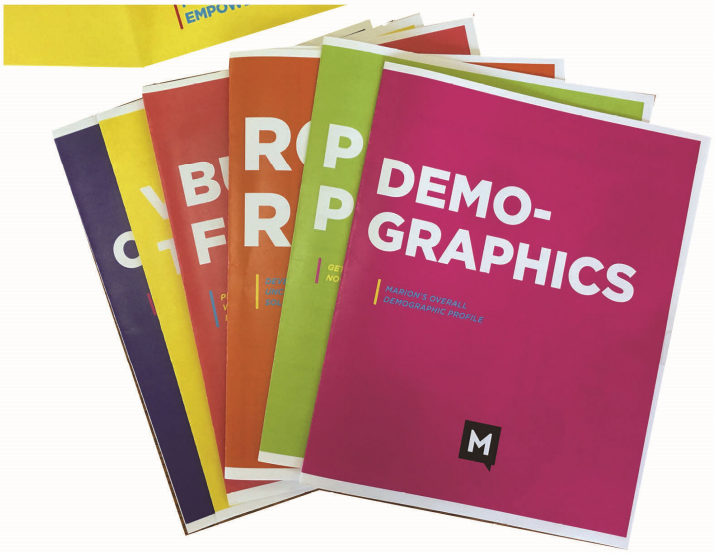
Appendix C: Booklet and Pamphlets for Design Thinking Session

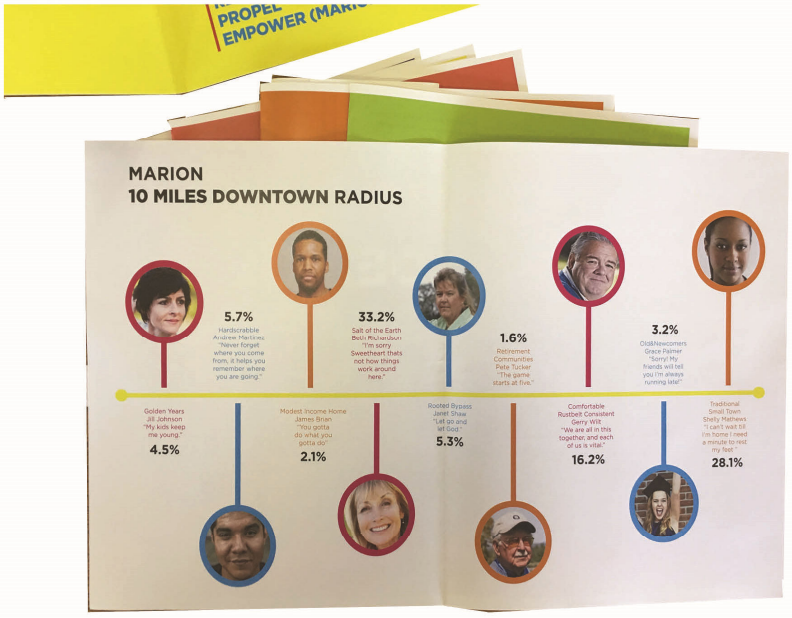
Booklet Cover:

Booklet with Pamphlets for Each Session:

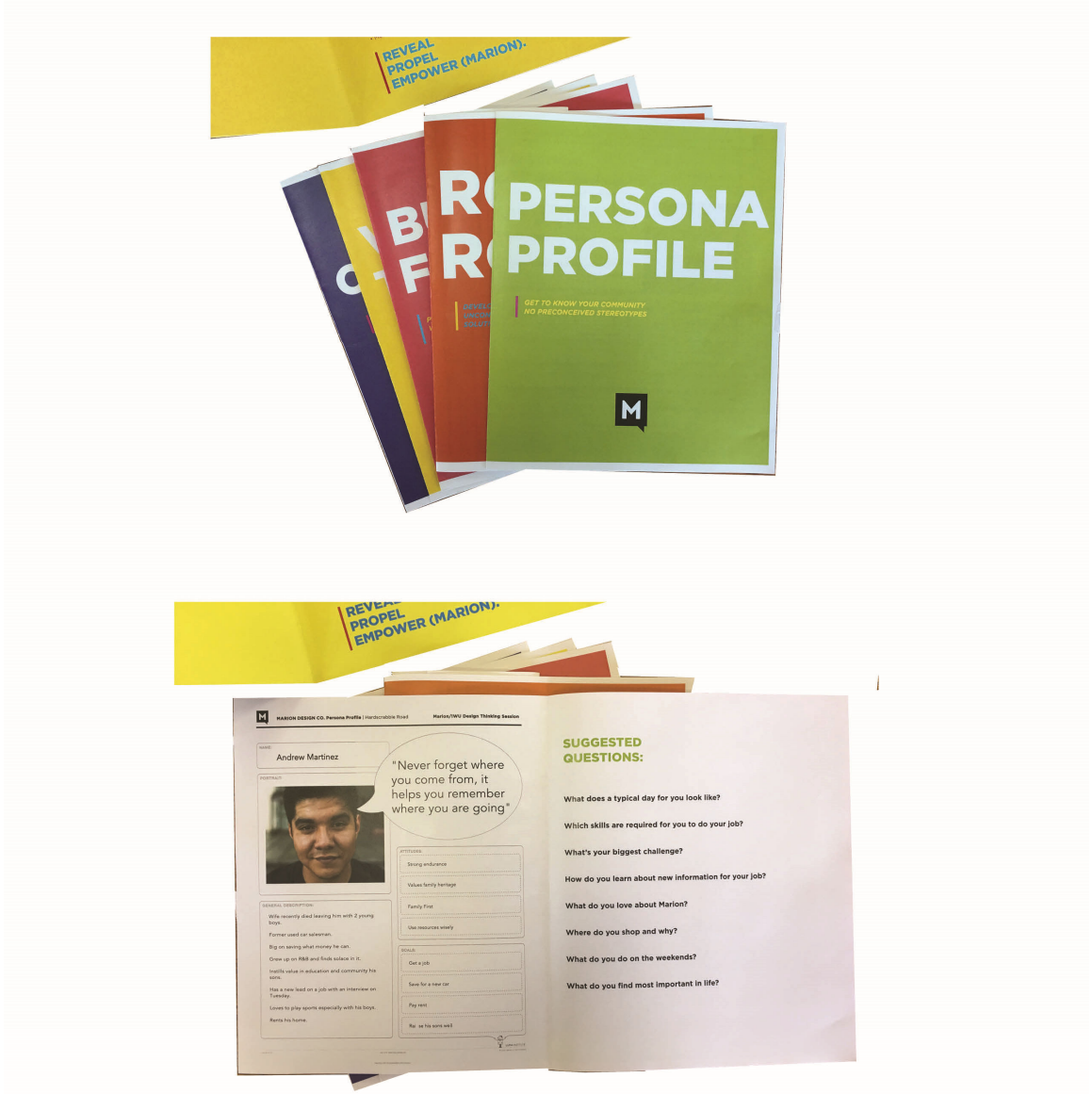
Innovation Checkup Pamphlet:

Demographics Pamplet:

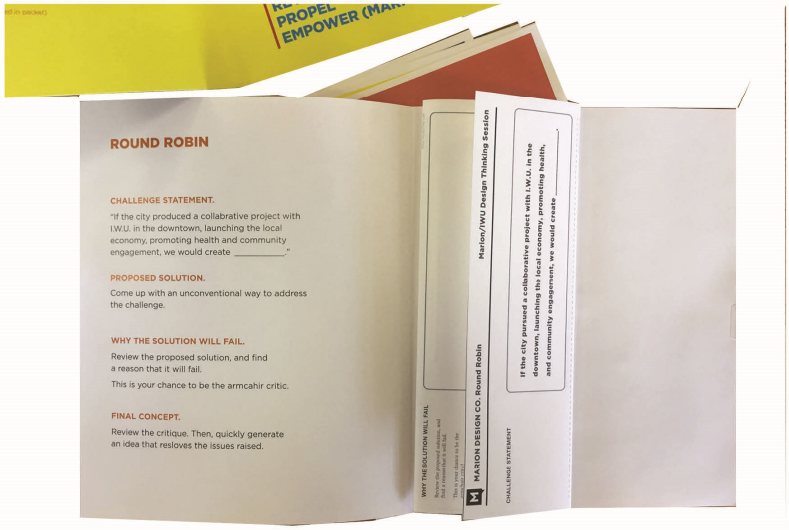




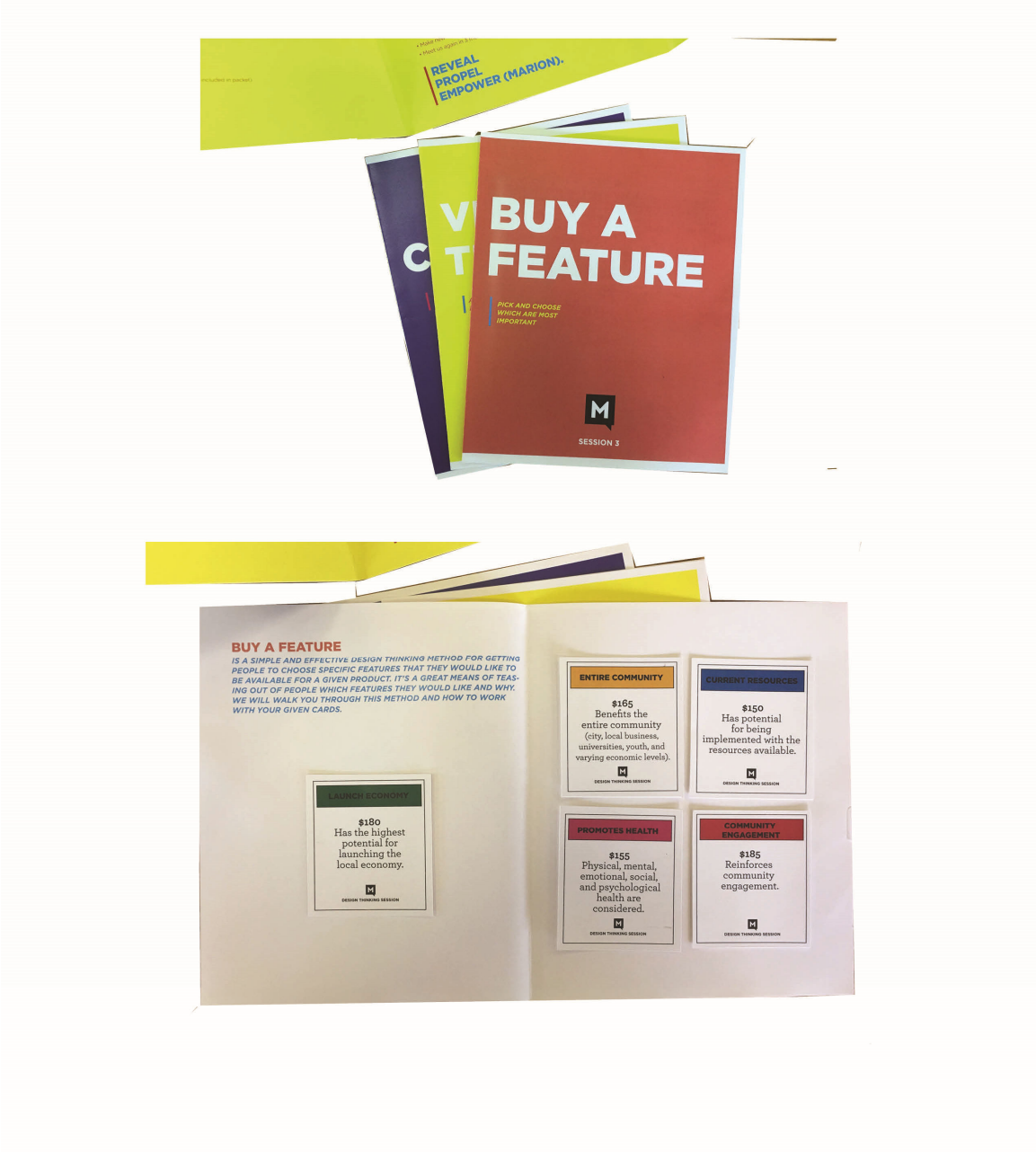
Persona Profile Pamphlet:



Round Robin Pamphlet:



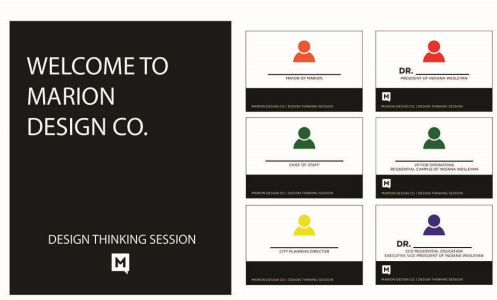
Buy a Feature Pamphlet:

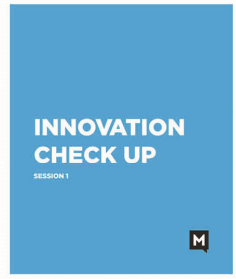


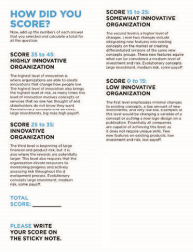
Visualize the Vote Pamphlet:

Contact List of Participants Pamphlet:

Appendix D: Visual Sequence of the Design Thinking Session with IWU and Marion Leadership

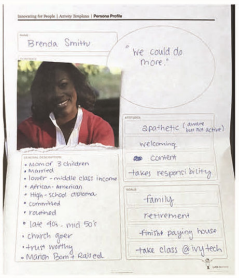




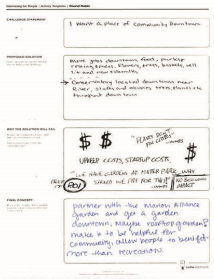


HOW INNOVATIVE IS YOUR ORGANIZATION?

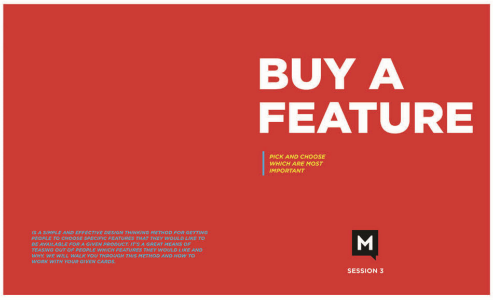
STUDENTS ROLE PLAY PERSONAS FOR CITY AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS

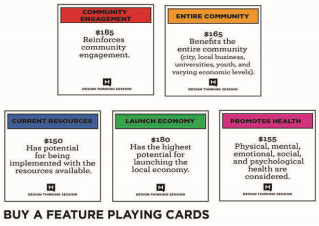


PERSONA PROFILE EXAMPLE



ROUND ROBIN EXAMPLE





BUY A FEATURE PLAYING CARDS

7 CONCEPTS

Marion City College

The Menagere

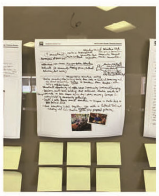
Market on the Square

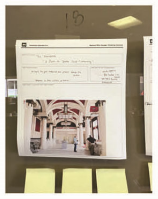
Fresh: Uniquely Grant County

Wildcat Row

The Movement

Marion on the Go





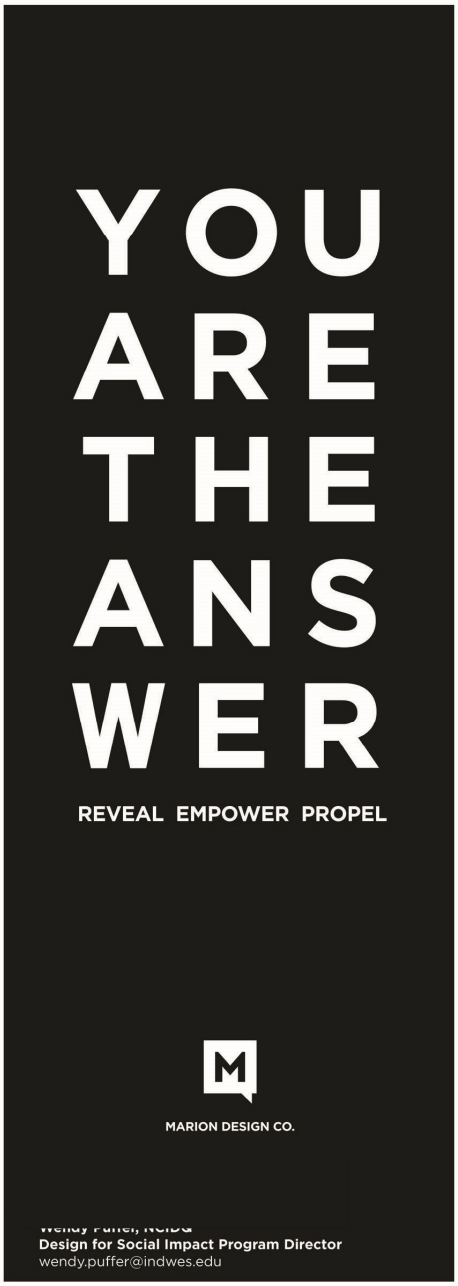
University and City Leaders voting for the best concepts.

TOP 3 WINNERS

Marion City College. An immersive, living/ learning educational community open to the public. Faculty members live on campus. Students could apply for a reverse scholarship with the agreement to work in Marion after graduation in order to pay back the loan over 5 years with no debt.

The Menagere. A place to spark creativity. Reteach the past, embrace the present, dream for the future.

The Movement. A flexible multi-use public recreational space for all demographics to promote community and wellness.



A BANNER THAT HANGS ON THE FRONT OF SALIN BANK APPROVED BY THE GRANT COUNTY COUNCIL (home of the donated bank where all of the research was conducted.

Appendix E: Consent Form

Art Department, Design Thinking Graduate Program
Wendy Puffer
5215 N. Peconga Dr.
Marion, Indiana 46952
P: 765-603-0078

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UNIVERSITY

Adult Informed Consent – Design Thinking Session 1, Nonsurvey Research

Title of Research: **Revitalization of the Downtown Square in a Small Rural City: The Impact of the University**

Researchers: Wendy Puffer and Dr. Joan Dickinson

We ask you to be in a research study that will apply design thinking strategies to explore the topic of the revitalization of Marion, Indiana and the potential impact the local university may have on its efforts. If you choose to be in the study, you will be asked to provide your opinion regarding Marion, Indiana. The method of research will be an Affinity Cluster, a form of a mind mapping exercise focusing on the question, "What words come to mind when you think of Marion?" The exercise will require one hour and thirty minutes of your time.

For the purpose of presentation and data analysis, you may be photographed or video taped during the research session. Please indicate whether you agree to be photographed and/or video taped:
_____I agree to both
_____I agree to be photographed.
_____I agree to be videotaped.
_____I don't agree.

This study has no more risk than you may find in daily life.

If you decide to be in this study you may or may not benefit from being a part of it. Some benefits to you may include 1) The satisfaction of knowing you participated in an activity that contributed to the revitalization of Marion, Indiana, and 2) Collaborative interaction with other participants from the local area.

You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be involved in parts of this study. You may also choose to stop being in this study at any time without any penalty to you.

This research study is funded in part by the Indiana Wesleyan University Office of Career Development. There are no costs to you for being in this study. There is no payment for you taking part in this study.

Art Department, Design Thinking Graduate Program
Wendy Puffer
5215 N. Peconga Dr.
Marion, Indiana 46952
P: 765-603-0078

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If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless required by law to tell. We will present the results of this study, but your name will not be linked in any way to what we present.

If at any time you want to stop being in this study, you may leave the study without penalty or loss of benefits by contacting:

If you have questions now about this study, ask before you sign this form.

If you have any questions later, you may talk with Wendy Puffer.

If you have any injury related to being in this study, you should call: Wendy Puffer, 1-765-603-0078.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Dr. Dennis Grady, Dean, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, Radford University, dgrady4@radford.edu, 1-540-831-7163.

Being in this study is your choice and choosing whether or not to take part in this study will not affect any current or future relationship with Radford University, Indiana Wesleyan University, or the city of Marion, Indiana.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

_____ _____

Date Signature

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the subject understands this information.

_____ _____

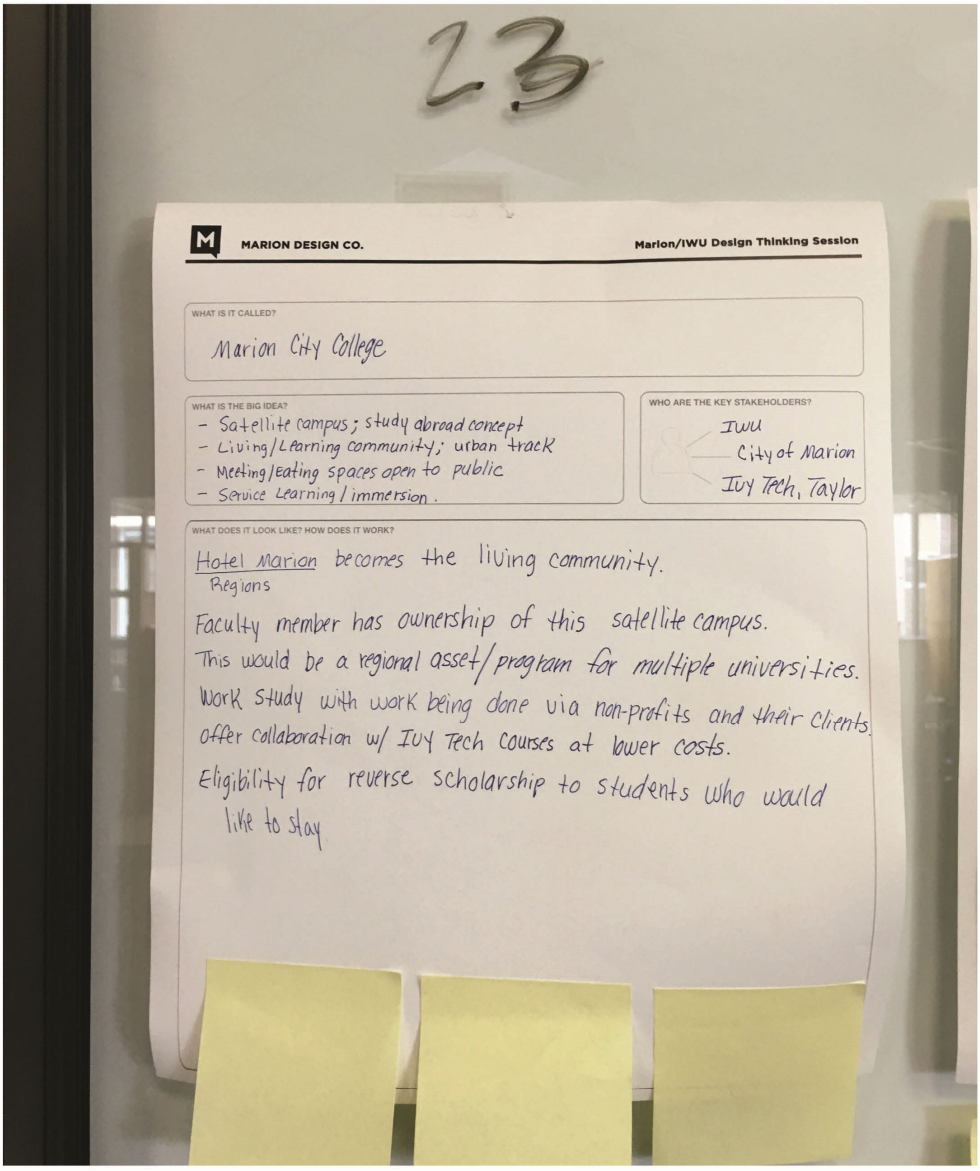
Signature of Researcher(s) Date

Note: A signed copy of this form will be given to the subject for the subject's records.

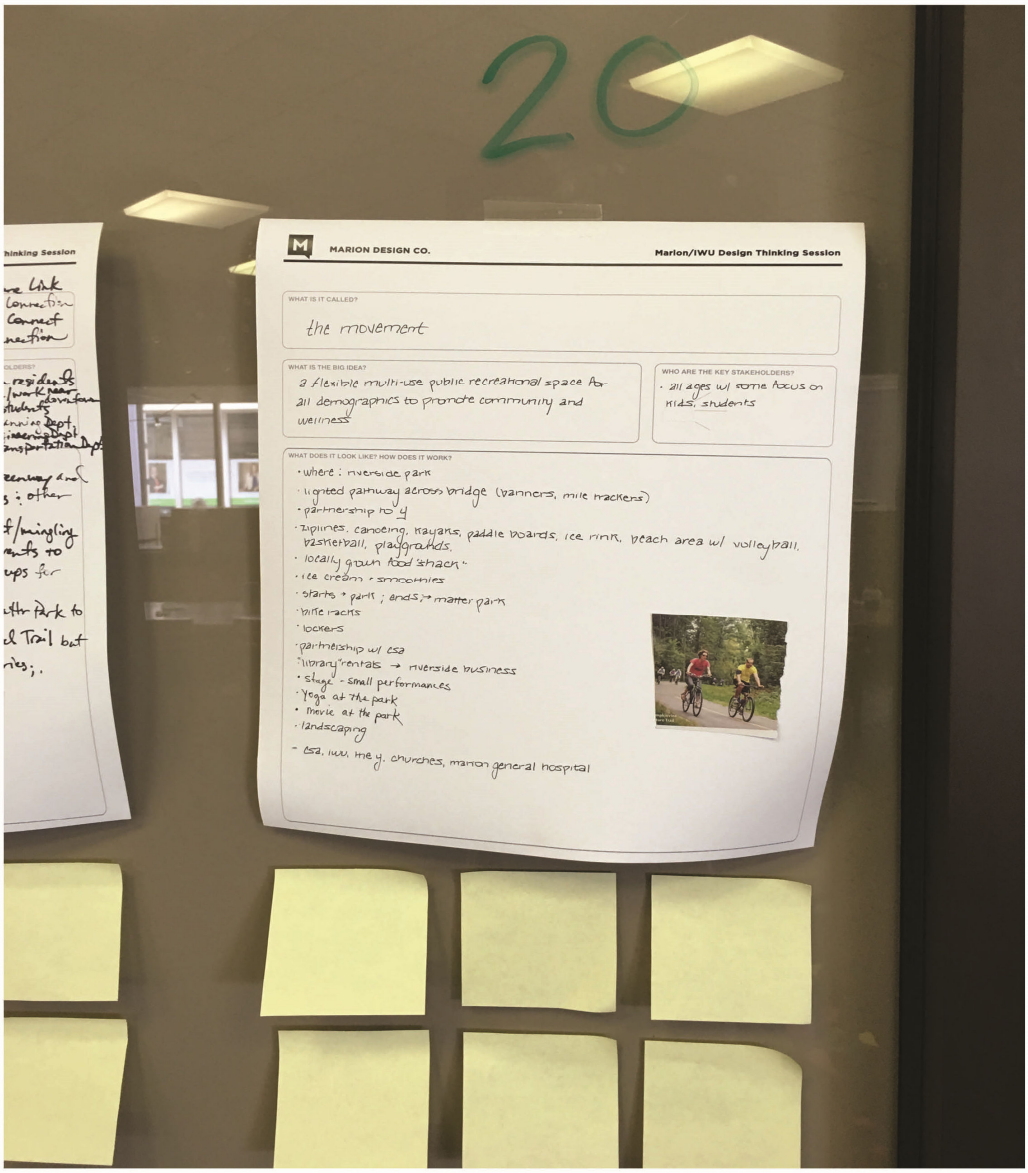
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
EXPIRES
SEP 0 5 2017
For Approval Date 9/6/16
RADFORD UNIVERSITY

Appendix F: Concept Posters

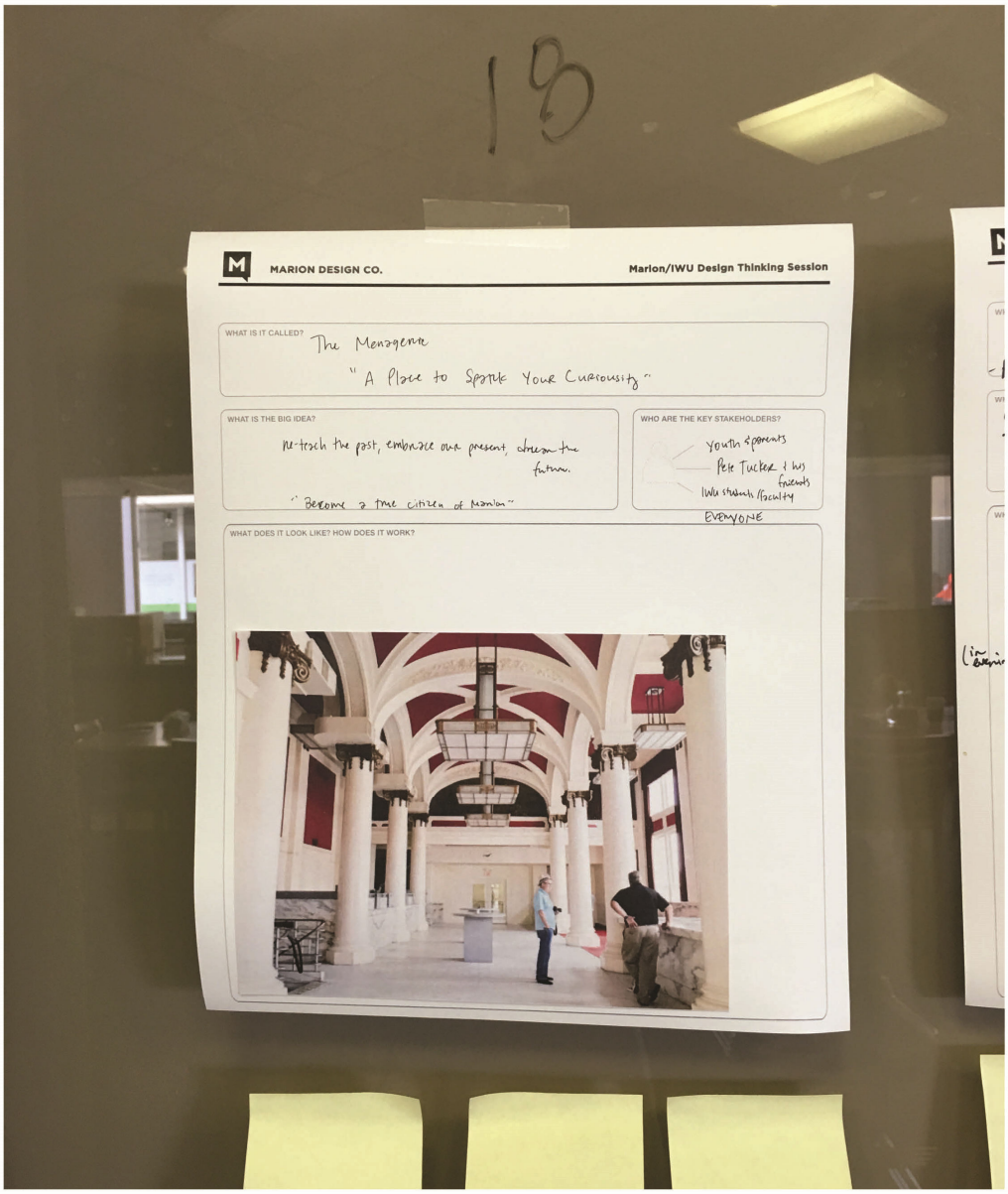
Marion City College Concept Poster:



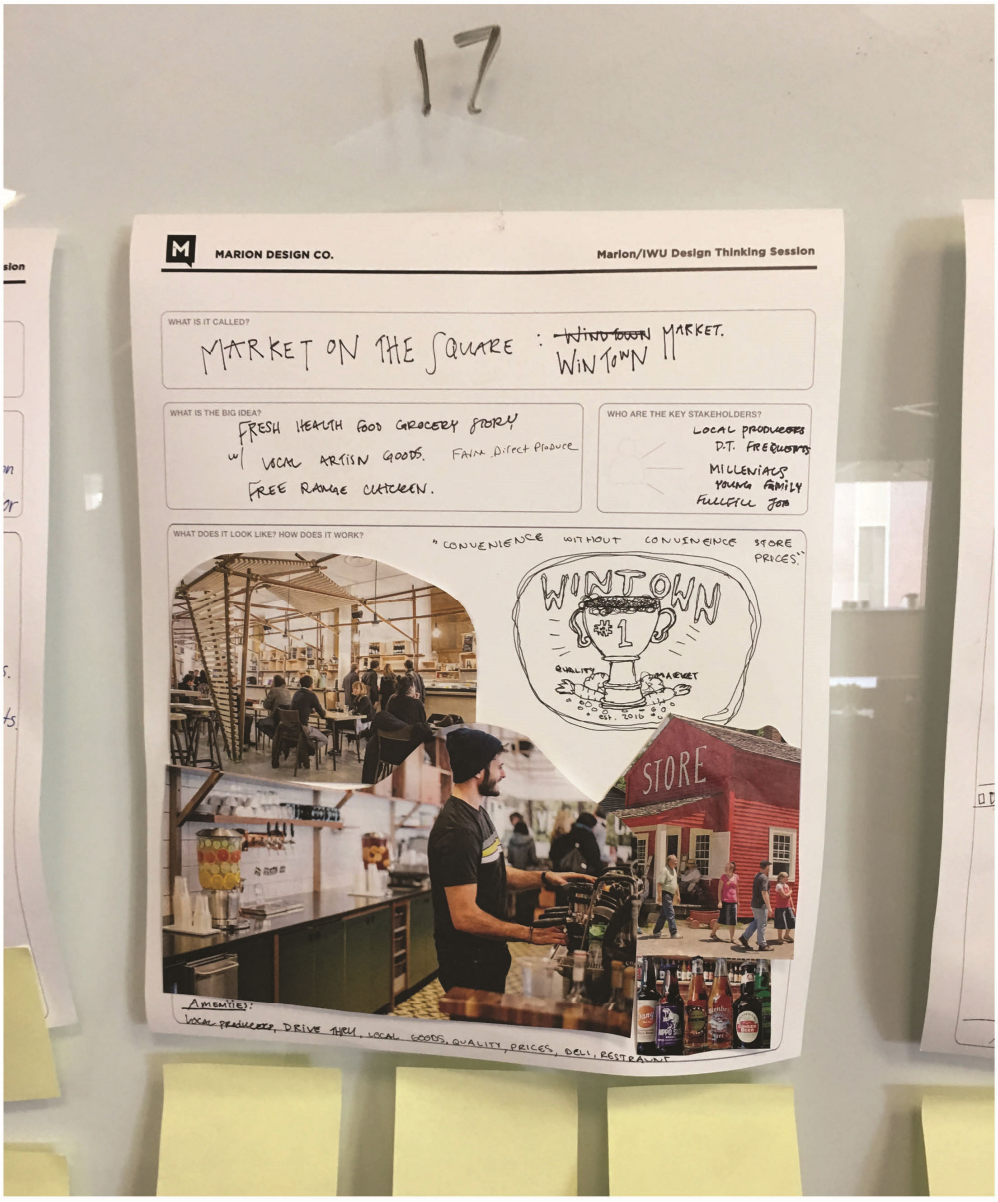
The Movement Concept Poster**:**



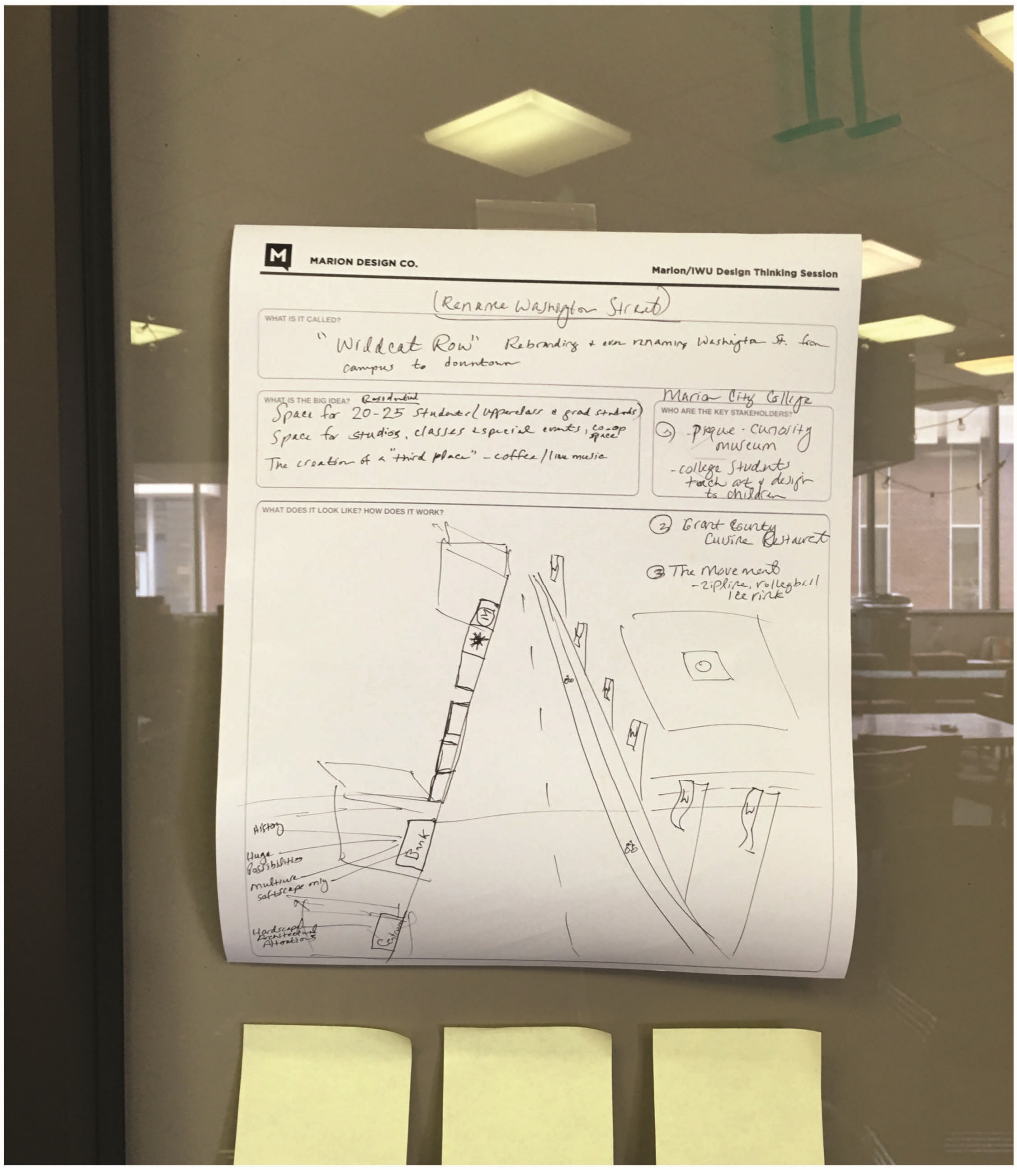
The Menagerie Concept Poster**:**



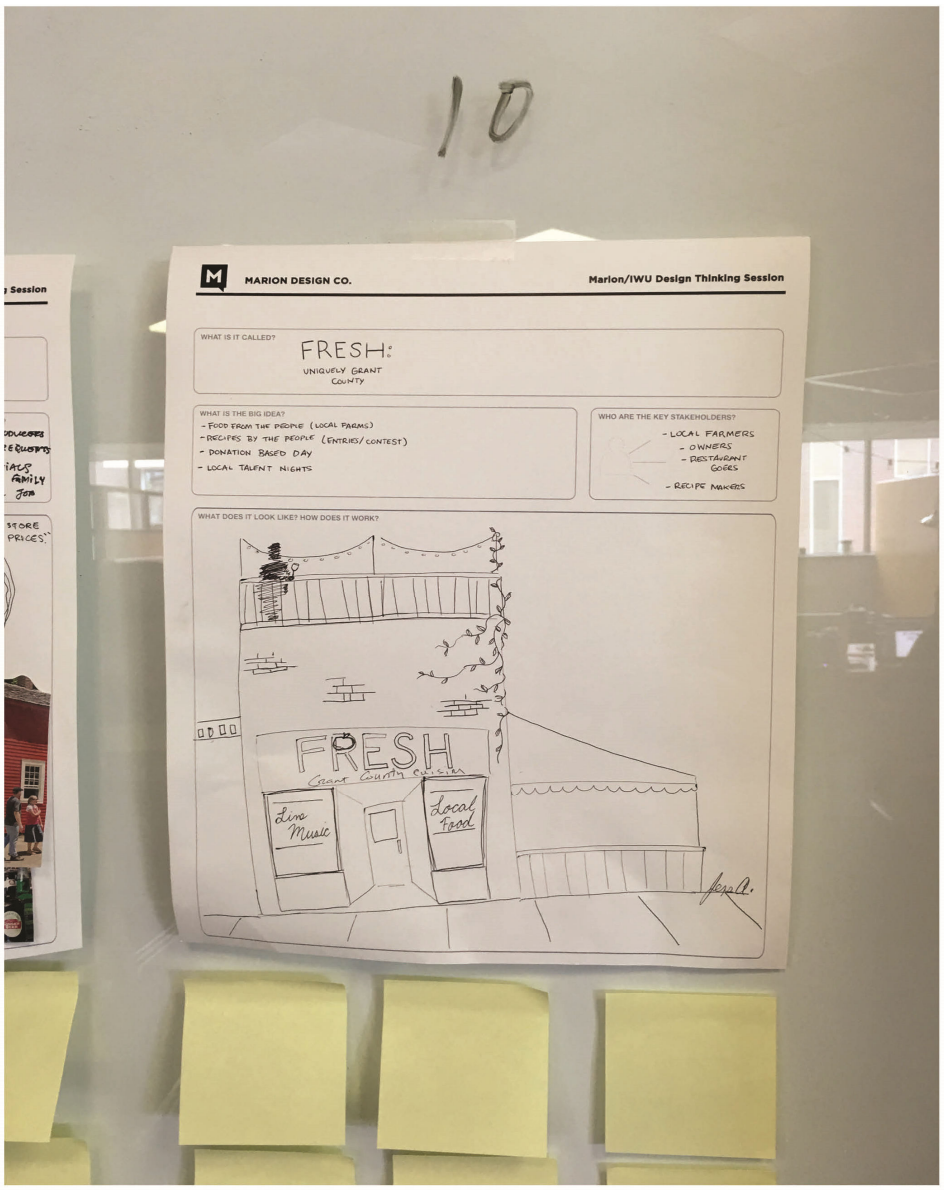
Market on the Square Concept Poster**:**



Wildcat Row Concept Poster**:**



Fresh: Uniquely Grant County Concept Poster**:**



Marion on the Go Concept Poster: