

**Co-Designing A Settlement House for *El Museo del Norte*:
Latina/o Museum and Cultural Center Settlement House Conceptual Study**
Larry M. Gant, LSMW, PhD
School of Social Work, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor



CBI Settlement House Concept and Project Coordinators:

Larry Gant (UM-Schools of Social Work/Art&Design), Maria Cotera (UM-Latina/o Studies Program),
Tom Cervenak (Peoples Community Services)

El Museo del Norte Project Coordinators:

Elena Herrada (*Fronteras Norteñas*), Maria Cotera (UM-Latina/o Studies Program),
Jennifer Peacock (Program in American Culture), Mick Kennedy (School of Architecture)

Core Committee:

Mike Garcia (UAW), Mary Luevanos (CLAVE); Lisa Luevanos (CLAVE), Diana Rivera (Michigan
State University), Gloria Rocha (*Comite Patriotico Mexicano*), Tom Cervenak (Peoples Community
Services), Larry Gant ((UM)

Introduction/Background

Community Based Initiative (CBI): Since 1999, CBI has trained and supported the generation of over 100 new social workers dedicated to community and social change in urban cities, neighborhoods, and communities. There is a long term presence of faculty work, faculty relationships, current students and CBI alumni who live and work in the area of SE Michigan with particular emphasis in and around Southwest Detroit. Coupled with community work projects from CASC and the SSW Technical Assistance Center, CBI has effectively established a “settlement house without walls” presence particularly in Southwest Detroit. CBI core courses (SW 647 & 697) were first taught in organizational locations throughout Detroit through 2006. We paid for rental space (though at a nominal rate – around \$200/month) for many of those locations). Faculty teaching obligations located CBI core course instruction in Ann Arbor through 2009. A regenerated CBI program returned instruction in Detroit (at Detroit Center) in 2010 to date. While Detroit Center is a solid, well-resourced site, the grounding within communities and neighborhoods so critical to CBI remains elusive. Additionally, our SW 697 community practice course has been taught by numerous faculty – three different faculty since our return to Detroit. Students are concerned that the activities in SW 697 are opportunistic and not integrated into a meaningful or coherent context. There is a sense of disconnect between course and

community – particularly given our return to Detroit.

El Museo del Norte: In 2009, the Latina/o Studies Program at the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, in partnership with *Fronteras Norteñas*, a Public History non-profit in Southwest Detroit, applied for and received funding from the U-M Arts of Citizenship Program to explore the possibility of creating a museum and cultural center that could document the historical presence of Latina/os in Michigan and thereby establish their key role in the life of the State. This exploration involved visits to cultural institutions (Charles C. Wright Center, Ziibiwing Museum, Arab American Museum) coupled with a year-long community conversation about the role of museums in public life and the centrality of history/storytelling to cultural citizenship and belonging.

Given the financial realities of the current economic downturn in Michigan, and the consequent reduction in funding for arts and humanities initiatives statewide, undertaking the design, construction, and management of a major museum seemed unlikely in the near term. An interim vision for *El Museo del Norte* as a “museum without walls” was actualized. In this museum without walls, community local artists and community residents would develop and curate exhibits, teaching and sharing with its members their history, art and culture. Oral history projects, speaker series, art walks, movie nights, musical performances and co-curated exhibits with established institutions that are eager to diversify their content and audience are some first steps that can be coordinated by a board or supporters seeking to establish a museum with walls. The “museum without walls” is an important first step in a process that will eventually lead to the construction of a museum in Southwest Detroit. The “museum without walls” strategy for *El Museo del Norte*, enables the development of a brand identity for the project, along with awareness about the need for a permanent museum documenting the lives and legacies of Latina/os in Michigan and the Midwest. A brand identity for *El Museo del Norte* was developed by an architecture and design student’s design of a logo and series of graphics used for signage, mailers, postcards, posters, and exhibits. A simple webportal (<http://www.elmuseodelnorte.org/index.html>) was redesigned by University of Michigan Latina/o Studies. Students created a series of interactive educational tools including two “art walk” maps (a guide to public art in southwest Detroit, and a guide to sites of “*trabajo rústico*” in Southeast Michigan).

Convergence Opportunity - Need for Community Presence and Community Work (SSW).

El Museo del Norte: After two years of planning and work, (and meeting in restaurants and living rooms) the core committee realized the need for a regular community location space - a “central cultural hub” - to meet, host lectures, film screenings, special events, secure office space, and create a visible community presence. However, the core committee readily acknowledged their limits in community engagement – door knocking, community organization, community mobilization, outreach, and planning. They readily agreed they worked in communities, but were not community workers – and they needed more than the few members of the core committee to do the work.

CBI: Throughout the years, core CBI faculty have discussed the possibility of a regular and consistent physical presence within Southwest Detroit with a number of community partners (e.g. UNI, PCS). CBI has been offered buildings for planning and classroom space.

What remained elusive was a compelling context or rationale for our presence, other than providing an immersion experience for our students or providing the opportunity for completion of short term projects. Since 2010, CBI and CO students have interned at the College for Creative Studies’ innovative C+PAD program (Community and Public Arts: Detroit). Funded by the Skillman Foundation Good

Neighborhoods (GN) Initiative, this was the first serious effort to use art programs as a community organizing and mobilizing vehicle for community capacity development since 2005. C+PAD created six physical art spaces in the six GN communities (one of which is Southwest Detroit). CBI interns were also directly responsible for developing a policy case identifying art programs (C+PAD in particular) as a revenue generator for local neighborhoods. CBI faculty have identified a number of students and faculty involved in using art in communities, including A&D professors Nick Tobier and Janie Paul (adjunct professor of SSW). Recently, a CBI faculty serves as professor of A&D (Gant).

In May 2012, CBI faculty resumed a discussion of possibilities and rationale for CBI community presence with PCS. Tom Cervenak proposed the idea of discussion the idea of a settlement house presence with the core committee of El Museo. He proposed I have an initial discussion with Maria Cotera to talk about possibilities. We've had extensive discussions since December 2011. PCS has proposed a particular space owned by Peoples' Community Services. This space, located at 412 W. Grand Blvd, is an 1800 sq. ft. residence. It has been used by PCS in earlier times as office space. We did a walk through of the facility. We discussed the possibility of a year long planning and discussion process for co-creating and designing a cultural hub. Given the need for El Museo and collaborative parties to begin the work now (given their timetable of events) we have explored the possibility of planning and designing as we do the community work. We have been offered the space for \$500/mo (rent and utilities included). This would be of curriculum benefit to the current 2011 and incoming 2012 Community Scholar cohorts (both CBI and NCS) with clear opportunities for CASC students. There would be opportunities for other CO students to engage in community planning and work. We also plan to orient and locate the 2013 CBI courses within the facility. Additionally, SW697 would have an ongoing community practice context to ground the course in community work. The arts emphasis would allow the development of an Arts Based Community Development approach not only to SW 697, but possibly to the whole of CBI and the CO concentration. Finally, this proposal would tap the vast experiences of Tom Cervenak, who has spent his professional career in the design and deployment of settlement houses. We envision Tom co-teaching or helping out considerably in the design of SW 697 to focus on community work within the context of community settlement houses. In his own words, "creating a 21st Art Based Settlement House would be a signature achievement for PCS."

A possible request to COLC is a planning grant of \$6000 that would be applied to:

1. Provide a regular community planning space for 12 months.
2. Assist in development of SW 697 curriculum development.
3. Develop community engagement strategies with PCS and El Museo del Norte.
4. Develop interdepartmental relationships with Latino/a Studies, SSW, and A&D.
5. Develop a model of 21st Century Settlement Houses
6. Develop a model of Art Based Community Practice for urban communities.