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Design Thinking in Action: From the Classroom to Duncan Plaza

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Photo Courtesy: Cordula Roser Gray.

By: Alexandra Greengrass.

"I always have seen the relationship between architecture and design thinking as an intricately connected one..."; said SE Professor Cordula Roser Gray. Roser Gray says the elements of design thinking are very present in Tulane's School of Architecture, as is the framework of designing for social impact, so working with Taylor felt natural.

After moving to New Orleans in 2003, Professor Roser Gray began at Tulane's School of Architecture as an adjunct professor, where she is currently leading "public arts projects that deal with community engagement and community censoring, and means of turning that censoring into visual data display". Roser Gray's current research interests within architecture center on inequities in ownership of land and reclamation of public space in New Orleans. Specifically, she focuses on strategic activation of abandoned lots for use to the surrounding neighborhoods.

In Duncan Plaza, Roser Gray is currently prototyping a project called VectorFlow, which includes canopies to revive the value of this park as a public amenity, by addressing lack of visibility and public safety. The five red canopies – which on their own, attract visitors with their bright colors and unique design – provide motion-sensor lighting at night and shade during the day.

"[The project] initiates a desire for change while enabling space to be dynamic [as well as creating] a permanent public node for meeting and gathering".

Interested in coordinating a SISE class, Roser Gray believes sustainable change can come from the intersections of architecture, community engagement, and design thinking for social impact.

"I'm very interested in place-making and public space and how to activate it, and also how to really integrate the community into decision making and activation. Dynamic public space – how do you create that; how do you orchestrate it?" said Roser Gray. These are some questions she explores in her own research and hopes to delve into further with Tulane students.

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