HP 252 ADAPTIVE REUSE ASSESSES PRE-CONSTRUCTION CONDITIONS OF REYNOLDS'S BUILDING

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Photos by Peter Piekarski Jr.

As the College of Design prepares for its transition to the new Gray Design Building, Travis Rose, a Lecturer in the Department of Historic Preservation, utilized this opportunity to integrate students into a professional application of the concepts they discussed in class. For two semesters, HP 252 Adaptive Reuse students observed and documented the condition of each material in the existing site, evaluated their state, and compiled the findings in a report that

outlined recommendations for how the University could preserve the building's resources and integrity moving forward.

"I wanted to create some kind of document that assessed the condition of the building before any work was done." Rose said of the project's intention. While prior documentation had occurred, students had access to the University's existing plan drawings and faculty reports, none had considered each material from a preservationist's point of view. Doing so not only created an opportunity to inform future maintenance of the site, but also provided contextualization for what changes took place in the Reynold's rehabilitation into the Gray Design Building. For example, with these documents students can now see where windows were replaced, reference the deterioration recorded in the assessment, and understand why certain decisions were made.

In addition to glass, students recorded the conditions of cementitious materials, stone, architectural ceramics, wood, metals, and modern synthetics. Findings were analyzed and categorized from Excellent to Critical, based on their conditions. Features with a less than Good classification were paired with recommendations on how to conserve, repair, or replace moments where wear or damage was most evident. Most commonly, the inflictor was an excess of water.

This proved true in the foundation and lower levels where metal corrosion, plaster deterioration, efflorescence, and wood rot could be attributed to the space's dampness. As with any historic building, the climate and water play a large role in its deterioration and interfering with this natural progression requires critical care and technique. The assessment warns against

water-proofing existing sites as it would trap any moisture already present in the material and excel the process of decay. Instead, the preservationist point of view promotes a greater maintenance to the exterior elements that may contribute to the building's exposure; such as sloping and down spouting to divert moving water away from the foundation or ensuring debris refrains from clogging any drainage systems.

Now that construction is nearing completion, it is already evident which suggestions the University took into consideration. While the assessment expresses caution towards sealing against water, a new approach is being applied to the interior surface rather than exterior. If successful, this will allow the material to breathe without leaking into the interior. Changes to the exterior site through the digging of a trench also has the potential to benefit issues with drainage while making natural light more accessible to lower-level spaces.

Although adjacent to the recommendations shared by the students, these design solutions do not adhere to the guidelines outlined by the Secretary of the Interiors for the rehabilitation of a historic landmark. However, Rose found it important to acknowledge that this was never the intention. By initiating an adaptive reuse of the Reynold's Warehouse, the University intended to alter the conditions into a facility capable of supporting an educational environment. By taking part in this project, students preserved the past's identity without restricting the future's potential. "The windows may be gone," Rose mourns, "but the building is being used."

This focus on humanity is what Rose finds most important and hopes that the experience on a real site conveyed this to the students as well, reminding them that each vision for a building will be different and not every reuse is from a preservationist's point of view. While on site, students were no longer practicing within an academic environment, but occupying a professional one with a much faster pace. Opportunities for documentation had to occur within the contractor's schedule, sometimes surveying an element the same day as its destruction. This required the navigation of new pressures that Rose feels will instill an appreciation for the human presence in a construction. As the majority of the students involved will be taking classes in the completed building, being able to experience the before and after will serve as a reminder of how much work really goes into a project of this scale.

At the assessment's completion, the students of HP 252 helped create a document that visualized the Gray Design Building at a specific moment in its history. While its intention was to be shared with the University for guidance in crafting a continued maintenance plan and offered students a form of contribution and ownership to their college, the capturing of this moment immortalized context for all future retrospection of the site. In 20 years, when even more change has occurred, access to the information collected in this project will not only tell us what decisions were made but offer an implication as to why.