

# My Experience on the Gray Design Building Research Team

By Mara Morris

Let me introduce myself. Hi reader, I'm Mara Morris, a recent graduate of the College of Design's undergraduate Architecture program. When I toured the college of design, I was told of a new College of Design building that, at the time, I was expected to be in by sophomore year. As each semester went by however, it was clear that my time at the University of Kentucky would be spent in Pence, Miller, and Bowman. Prospective student me would've been disappointed by this, but by my third year, I didn't mind that I would never study inside of the Gray Design Building. I had heard whispers of the building's shortcomings and I wasn't accustomed to an open studio layout. The whole thing just seemed like a hassle if I'm being honest. A waste of time and resources.

There is a wall on the third floor of Miller where everyone hangs their club posters and important updates. It was studio clean out day; I had just finished my last undergrad studio and had no prospects post graduation. To put it simply, I needed a job, so on this particular day the "HELP WANTED" poster caught my eye. Knowing virtually nothing of the job, I applied for the "New College of Design Research Position." It was the last day of interviews and my hopes were not high, but thankfully Professor SK O'Brien gave me the opportunity to join the team. From this moment on, I would be a part of the team, where I learned something new every day, changed my perspective, and felt as though I was doing something so important even if no one ever saw the fruits of our labor.

Max Moiser, Caitlyn Smith, and I kicked off our summer researching the very broad and general topic of "The Gray Design Building." There was no deliverable, no end goal in sight, Professor SK gave us a topic and asked us to learn. I was still apprehensive of the new building. It took me all of three days to fall in love with the potential Jeanne Gang Architects. With everyday came a new either a new bit of information or challenged a rumor that I mistook for the truth. I was reminded to never form an opinion devoid of the facts or proper investigation. Immediately I felt an obligation to spread the word. If you were around me this past summer, you know that the Gray Design Building was my number one conversation starter. It was beautiful to watch others, who adamantly turned their backs on the Gray Design Building slowly change in attitude when I shared my favorite facts...

- There are 87 geothermal wells in the parking lot that will serve the HVAC system in the building.
- The new shop is not only bigger but will now have a "Soft Lab" that allows student to work with fiber and a "Black Box" for photography (FINALLY!).
- In the open studio layout, all first year students will be grouped together in order to encourage cross disciplinary work and discussion allowing for students to discover their place in the College of Design and possibly switch between majors.
- There is quiet phone booth areas for students and professor to use for private calls or overstimulation.
- Open studios. Post research of open studios on the West Coast and in Canada, I believe they are seriously cool. Imagine looking at a model on a product design students desk as an architecture student and imagining it to be a building, not a hand held object. Free inspiration and non-verbal collaboration, yes please!
- A building designed by a woman led firm; a woman who earned where she is today through beautiful and innovative design. Jeanne Gang and her team of architects are an inspiration of

what is possible for all people who feel as though they are disadvantaged by an attribute of themselves which they did not impart of themselves and cannot change. We are all worthy of great opportunities.

- There is a “Maker’s Yard” with tools to allow students to build full scale projects. No longer will a student’s imagination be limited to the confines of their studio desk.
- Speaking of studio desks, each student gets their own modular studio desk that will follow them throughout their time at the College of Design, so (if I were a student) trick those desks out, paint them, graffiti them, inspire others with your cool, artsy, innovative space.

I could go on for quite a bit longer, but that would defeat the purpose of a concise bullet point list. I think I needed the knowledge from researching the Gray Design Building more than it needed me. I’ve realized my thoughts pre-research were simply hypotheses, and while I was never good at chemistry, I do remember that the point of the hypothesis is to be tested through experimentation. My hypothesis of the Gray Design Building were proven wrong and I couldn’t be happier about it.

To the future students, professors, and inhabitants of the Gray Design Building – there is so much potential in the space you are going to fill. All that it is missing is you, your imagination, and your ability to evolve and adapt. Utilize every inch of the Gray Design Building, take up space, use your voice and leave your mark! I’m bitterly excited for you; what I would do to be in a learning environment like the one you will be in. The power is in your hands now.