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Models as a Tool for Interdisciplinary and International Teaching and Learning in Art, Architecture and Design

Built Environment + Art & Design

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1. Executive Summary

The project

This project utilised funding to build an international interdisciplinary community of academics working with models in their teaching and research practice. It developed knowledge on how to teach and learn with models across the disciplines of Art, Architecture and Design, and built upon existing partnerships between UNSW Built Environment, UNSW Art & Design and Parsons The New School of Design (New York). The project generated a significant original collection of video, photographic, audio and written records of interviews conducted between UNSW and Parsons staff.

Context

In art, architecture and design models – including prototypes, maquettes, process models and simulations – are crucial to the way we teach and learn. Models help us investigate concepts, share ideas and discover new ways of working. As a common tool across the diverse fields of material thinking, models prompt cross-disciplinary conversations and exchange of knowledge.

The rapid growth of virtual and data based models, as well as 3D printing and other automated modelling technologies is significantly impacting on teaching and learning in art, architecture and design. New interdisciplinary thinking about the role of model making – as a conceptual and skilful activity for students – is needed.

Through a number of initiatives in 2017 we established that discipline-specific ways of learning and teaching with models can be extended by considering the practice of modelling as a transformative tool of adaptation and change. This paved the way for new ways of thinking about teaching practices in relation to models that engage with contemporary technologies and draw from the rich traditions of hand-made modelling.

Aims of the project

1. To build upon and develop the productive, transformative and interdisciplinary dialogue between UNSW Built Environment, UNSW Art & Design and Parsons New School of Design in relation to teaching and learning with models;
2. To produce inspiring, unique and high-quality learning experiences for students that position UNSW at the forefront of teaching and learning in material thinking;
3. To investigate the juxtaposition of discipline-specific methods of teaching and learning with models in order to address the impact of new technologies, draw out existing alignments, generate new thinking and to apply new knowledge in an internationalised educational scenario;
4. To position our demonstrated expertise with models as global best practice that is nationally and internationally recognised.

Priorities

The project addressed the UNSW 2025 Strategy Priorities:

Strategic Priority A: Academic Excellence
   A2: Educational Excellence - The UNSW Scientia Educational Experience

Strategic Priority C: Global Impact
   C1: UNSW model of internationally engaged education
   C2: Partnerships that facilitate our strategy
This project addressed UNSW SEIF Priority 3:

Significantly enhance the student experience or student outcomes via any other original approach not covered above or in other funded schemes like the Inspired Learning Initiative or UNSW 3+ calendar.

Outputs

Through this project we have developed strong and generative relationships between academic staff working with models in UNSW Built Environment, UNSW Art & Design and Parsons The New School of Design (New York). We have built on this relationship to develop specialist knowledge captured in a series of original video, photographic, audio and written recordings of interviews.

The outputs for this project include an electronic book that juxtaposes still images extracted from the video recordings with edited transcripts of the interviews. This book will be shared among staff at UNSW and Parsons who contributed to the project, and will be made available to students of participating staff.

At the conclusion of this project, the recordings are retained in a raw, unedited format due to an unexpected reduction in the project budget.

These recordings form a unique these activities will provide inspiring and unique internationalised learning experiences for students, as well as profound professional development for staff. Over the course of the project we aim to investigate the potential for developing new interdisciplinary online/intensive course offerings to commence in 2020.

2. Outcomes and impact

Achievements

1. The project has developed a productive and collaborative cross-faculty dialogue across UNSW Built Environment and UNSW Art & Design that recognises and expands existing expertise in teaching and learning with models.

2. The project has developed a productive and collaborative inter-institutional dialogue across UNSW and Parsons The New School of Design and provided opportunities for staff exchange and sharing of expertise.

3. The project has orientated staff at both institutions towards future shifts in professional practice in the fields of Art, Architecture and Design and has ensured that UNSW is participating in global developments in the area of interdisciplinary modelling across Art, Architecture and Design.

4. The project generated a significant original archive of video, photographic, audio and written records of interviews conducted between UNSW and Parsons staff in the areas of interdisciplinary modelling across Art, Architecture and Design.

5. The project has generated a substantial electronic book that will be shared across participating staff at both institutions and with students of modelling in the disciplines of Art, Architecture and Design.

Outcomes

1. A series of 5 one hour video interviews with staff at Parsons New School of Design:

   a. Simone Douglas, Professor of Photography, Parsons New School of Design. The interview focusses on modelling as a transformative and collaborative practice across disciplines.
b. **Allan Wexler**, Artist, Parsons New School of Design. The interview focusses on modelling as a mode of world-making that transcends disciplines.

c. **Timo Risannen**, Associate Professor of Fashion and Sustainability, Parsons New School of Design. The interview focusses on modelling care as a core aspect of sustainable design practice.

d. **Luciana Scrattoni**, Assistant Professor of Fashion, Parsons New School of Design. The interview focusses on ethical and material innovations in modelling.

e. **Gyungju Chyon**, Assistant Professor of Product and Industrial Design, Parsons New School of Design. The interview focusses on the challenges of modelling the immaterial aspects of atmosphere.

2. A series of 2 video recordings of modelling studios taught at Parsons (video and audio recordings):

   a. **Dave Marin**, Assistant Professor of Modelling Technologies, Parsons New School of Design. The recording focusses on the student experience of modelling in a series of presentations of modelled objects.

   b. **Lan Thao Lam**, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, Parsons New School of Design. The recording focusses on the student experience of learning to model in a professional workshop.


5. A website [www.modellingworlds.com](http://www.modellingworlds.com) developed in collaboration with our creative partners Craig Walker (50% complete, not currently live).

The Masterclasses that were initially proposed for this project were cancelled due to unreconcilable timetabling complications with the implementation of UNSW 3+ and availability of students and staff at UNSW and Parsons.

**Impact**

The project was designed to deliver an online teaching resource that would benefit several hundred students and staff of UNSW and Parsons who teach and learn with models across the disciplines of Art, Architecture and Design. We directed a substantial amount of our grant to the development of this resource that would be progressively developed through masterclasses, studio courses and research and that would, through open access, continue to attract modelling expertise and to be continually disseminated through teaching across UNSW and Parsons.

A funding cut of $10k announced when this project was very close to conclusion, however, had a dramatic effect on our ability to work with the material we collected and ultimately to deliver it in the format we had intended. The last $10k of our grant was earmarked for editing and publication, and without this component of funding the impact of the material we collected was substantially compromised.
As a direct result of the reduction in funding we were not able to:

- Complete the editing of video footage;
- Incorporate the video footage into the Modelling Worlds website;
- Make the videos accessible to students and staff at UNSW and Parsons on the Modelling Worlds website;
- Complete the Modelling Worlds website, as without video footage the site required significant redesign to function and redesign was beyond our remaining budget.

2. Dissemination strategies and outputs

International presentation


This paper was presented to an international audience with expertise in architectural modelling from Europe, Canada, USA and Australia.

Electronic book

In response to changes in funding, we adjusted the principal project output. A small amount of additional funding was provided by the ADE Built Environment, which enabled us to reshape the outcomes to produce an electronic book incorporating a large number of still images extracted from the videos, as well as edited transcripts of the interviews.

It is our intention to share this book with staff at UNSW and Parsons who participated in this project and with their students as they so desire.

Without the website, the number of students this project impacts upon is substantially reduced due to the dissemination of the book now having to be via staff. It does, however, form an excellent foundation for developing the resource for future interdisciplinary and inter-institutional modelling courses.

Online teaching resource

The online resource was to be the culmination of this project – it was to enable teachers, researchers and students from all over the world to see the expertise of UNSW and Parsons students in relation to modelling. This outcome was key to communicating the project to UNSW and to a broader audience. The online resource was to form the basis of future course offerings for UNSW Built Environment and Art & Design students (up to 100 students annually).

3. Evaluation of project outcomes

The project enabled us to build a solid foundation for future collaboration between UNSW Built Environment, UNSW Art & Design and Parsons New School. The electronic book that we are currently finalising is a valuable resource that we will be able to share with colleagues involved in teaching and learning with models at UNSW, Parsons and other national and international institutions.

The project highlights:

- The diversity of approaches to modelling evident in contemporary teaching in Art, Architecture and Design in both practical and conceptual terms across two institutions;
• The importance of teaching and learning interdisciplinary agility across the disciplines of Art, Architecture and Design, and the agency of diverse modelling processes and techniques in facilitating that agility
• The importance of sharing lived experience among academics and students teaching and learning with models across the disciplines of Art, Architecture and Design.