

ECOSA Experience Interview:

Caitlin Goodwin, B. Arch, 2010

Q: What aspects of the ECOSA experience were most important to you in terms of applying it to your area of study?

A: There were a large number of lectures about materials and technologies that could improve building performance. Even though I'd spent time at Ball State researching options for sustainable building, a lot of what I learned in these lectures was completely new to me. We had a solar energy specialist come in and walk us through the entire process of sizing panels for a building, installing them, and maintaining them. That kind of in depth discussion was very eye opening.

Q: Did you feel challenged? And did you learn a lot of completely new information?

A: Most of the information I learned at ECOSA was new to me, and in this regard it challenged the way I thought about design. We had two real clients for projects, and meeting with them and getting their feedback really put the pressure on to produce the best work I could.

Q: What year of CAP/ARCH do you think ECOSA would be the best fit for?

A: ECOSA is really geared towards individuals, not just architecture students, interested in sustainable design. The level of experience you bring to the table is respected, and there is no one left behind if they happen to have less design experience. I would encourage students who have a specific interest in sustainable/regenerative design to attend. As far as what's feasible at CAP, there are always summer studios at ECOSA, or one can take the last semester of senior year.

Q: How was the semester set up, in terms of classes, topics studied etc.

A: The semester was not split up into separate classes. You arrived at 9 in the morning and left at 3, but you never had the same day twice. There are lectures, random studio hours, field trips, and discussions dispersed throughout the days and weeks. It really keeps you on your toes. The topics studied are also in a relatively non-sequential order, although design basics are discussed early on for those with less design experience.

Q: Did you find this setup was effective for learning?

A: It was a very successful set up. The schedule kept you fresh and alert, rather than expecting to do something. There would be an interesting lecture, and then you could go immediately to your studio project and try to incorporate what you learned, which helped you retain the information.

Q: What types of field trips did you take? Which was your favorite?

A: There was the initial trip out into the Arizona wilderness with a survival expert for three days, which is the first thing done at ECOSA. It was a life changing experience, and not for the faint of heart. We later took field trips to various works of architecture in Arizona and visited a few architects. My favorite trip was to Arcosanti, where we got to stay overnight in a built work of Paolo Soleri. Later on that trip we met Paolo himself and interviewed him.

Q: Of the speakers and lecturers who came to ECOSA, or who you met with, which was the most interesting?

A: There was a materials specialist who came and lectured on a lot of the "green" materials available on the market. He went through deciphering which claims and rating organizations were legitimate, and then showed us a wide variety of products and how they were made. It really broadened my horizons in terms of what I could consider using in a design and how to be sure I'm getting something legitimate.

Q: What are the areas of interest that students attending ECOSA could hope to learn about? Name as many areas as you can.

A: Sustainability and Regenerative Design are the main focus of ECOSA. However some other topics explored were engineering, special construction materials, river and wetland health and rehabilitation, south western history and culture, plant life of Arizona, desert survival, city planning, human interaction with design, the "Green Movement", and how consumption affects different areas of society and world at large.

Q: How helpful were the instructors in terms of exploring your own personal interests?

A: Since it is usually a relatively small studio group per semester (15-25 students) and everyone has a slightly different background, your personal direction and ideas are very much in the light. Everyone engages in discussions, and it really helps you solidify your ideas through questioning and offering alternatives. The instructors will offer additional help in your areas of interest, many times pointing you in the right direction to do further research on your own.

Q: Was the workload similar to that normally seen at CAP, or was it more self directed?

A: It was a little more self directed, but certainly not an opportunity to do less work. Studio time was not set in stone, and more of it was allotted in the few weeks before a project due date than in the initial weeks after its introduction. This flexibility was helpful in keeping the workload manageable.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to tell students about ECOSA or your experience there?

A: If you're willing to change things up, move halfway across the country, and broaden all or most of your horizons, ECOSA is the place for you!