

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

DR. ANDREW GIPE-LAZAROU

AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT



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BLIND DESIGN WORKSHOP



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ARCH. STUDIO



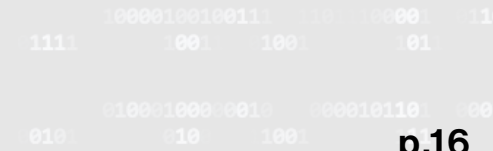
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AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

2024-2025

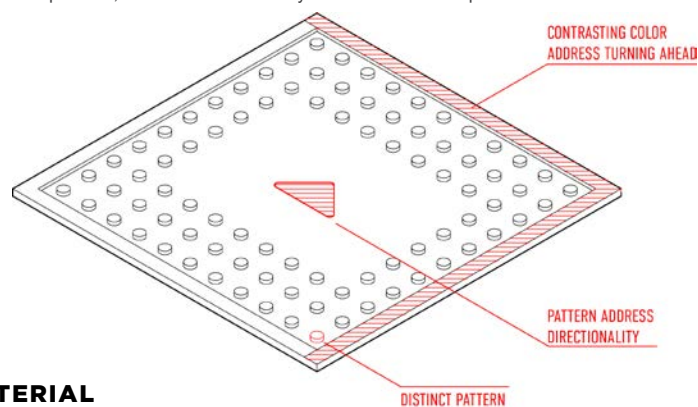
During the 2024-2025 academic year, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou led the development and instruction of a year-long workshop, titled "AI-Accessibility", supported by seed grant funding from the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology (ICAT), for which he served as principal investigator (PI). The course engaged 35+ undergraduate and graduate students from Architecture, Design, Computer Engineering, Human Sciences, and Marketing, in the collaborative innovation of building technologies designed to leverage advanced material fabrication and artificial intelligence (AI) to create more intuitive and accessible spaces for individuals with disability. The 1-credit seminar was organized around an immersive, student-led exhibition at the Moss Arts Center in April of 2025. Co-PI(s) / collaborating faculty and researchers who substantially contributed to course development, technical support, and student instruction included Luis Borunda, Na Meng, Meng Zhu, Abhijit Sarkar, Ralisa Dawkins, Rishith Gandham, Zixi Li, and Shraddha Thanneeru.

SYLLABUS_2024-2025

PROJECT DESCR.:

Students enrolled in this seminar, working in small teams, will utilize AI tools to reimagine spatial experiences which present challenges of comprehension, occupation, navigation, et al. to individuals with vision-impairment. A selection of project proposals will be further developed in the spring and included in an interactive exhibition to be hosted in the Cube, on Wednesday, April 9th, 2025.

- RESEARCH:** Students will work collaboratively to research, organize, and present 1) the capabilities of AI to inform space-making / building design + 2) the capabilities of AI to facilitate spatial comprehension for individuals with vision-impairment + 3) conventional approaches to accessible / inclusive space-making (including an overview of relevant building codes and standards) + 4) mechanisms for physical-digital interaction (e.g. QR codes).
- ANALYSIS:** Working independently or in small teams, students will first identify, then analyze a spatial experience which presents a particular challenge to individuals with vision-impairment. The analysis should articulate the nature of the challenge, both for the individual *and* for any relevant assistive technology (e.g. AI, white canes); it should be presented graphically and in writing; and it should attempt to identify opportunities for improvement in the design of both physical space and applied technologies.
- PROPOSALS:** Student design teams will present their proposals for spaces / spatial components which resolve the challenges identified in their analysis. The proposal should both present a design solution which resolves the challenge more broadly (e.g. how signage could be better-integrated into buildings, to improve detectability with and without the use of an AI device) *and* elaborate on how this design could be included in the Cube exhibition. The Cube measures 40 x 48 feet and features one of the largest immersive audio systems in the world, together with a projection system that enables projection mapping on all walls. The final exhibition will feature installations as a sequence of spaces experienced by sighted visitors and vision-impaired attendees equipped with a white cane and smartphone. All proposals must include a full-scale, physical mock-up of one or more definitive spatial components, to have been tested by the time of the final presentation.



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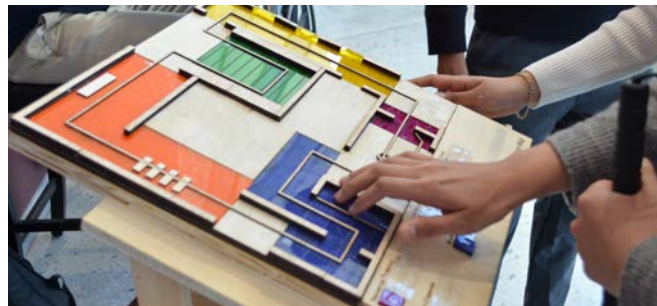
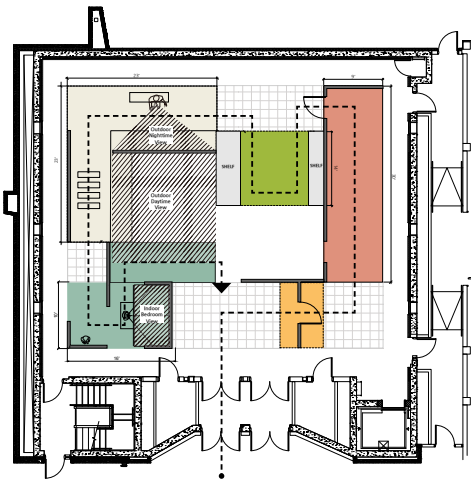
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AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

CUBE EXHIBITION

The "AI-Accessibility" exhibition, which showcased student work in Virginia Tech's premier exhibition space (a 40x48' black box known as "the Cube"), gave attendees the opportunity to interact with five re-designed spaces while using a white cane blindfolded; these included a residential threshold, hospital hallway, retail outlet, sidewalk-crosswalk, and museum. Among the featured innovations were smart handrails, interactive floor and wall tiles, and AI-information stations. The exhibition was attended by 172 people over the course of 5 hours.



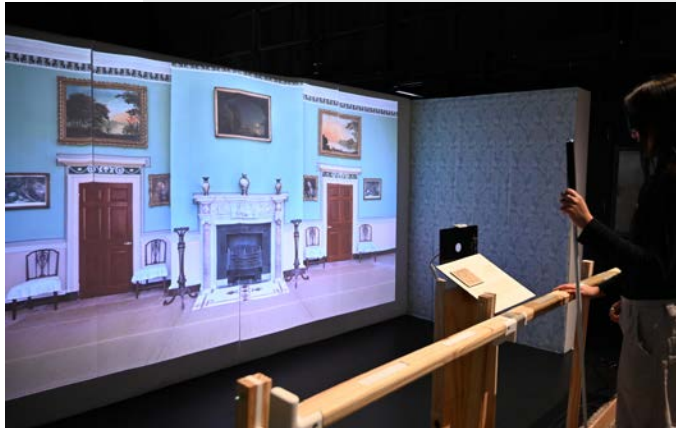
Tactile exhibition map (above) showing exhibition attendees, immediately prior to entering the Cube (i.e. having already donned their goggles and begun using their canes), the counter-clockwise exhibit sequence.

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AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

CUBE EXHIBITION



The museum space, which included a projected simulation of George Washington's bedroom at Mount Vernon (above left) included a hands-free AI-info station with which attendees could dialogue about the space, and showcased a smart handrail system (above right) which looped its way through the exhibit, providing both tactile cues and QR-code navigation instructions.



The sidewalk-crosswalk exhibit included QR-code sidewalk tiles and a hands-free AI-info station embedded in accessible public seating which enabled attendees to dialogue about the projected urban scene opposite, before continuing to an illuminated crosswalk.

“

Looking back on the [AI-Accessibility] seminar, I feel very grateful for the experience, especially for your guidance which helped me understand key principles around accessibility, such as tactile cues, details, and navigation design. I didn't expect to enjoy cutting wood and hammering nails, but the design-build process was so engaging. It helped me grow not just in design thinking but in navigating complex human dynamics that surround creative work, especially in contexts as emotionally sensitive and ethically urgent as disability design.”

– Yuxuan Sun (undergrad. arch. student), “hospital corridor” Team Lead

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AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

CUBE EXHIBITION

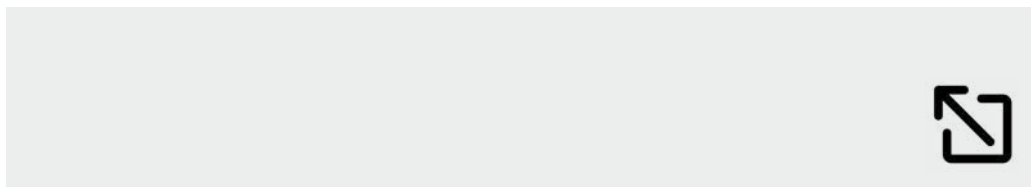
Prior to entering the Cube, all attendees received on-site mobility training by the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI). Each attendee was then issued a white cane and a pair of vision deprivation goggles. And, upon exiting the Cube, DBVI staff debriefed attendees about their experience, clarifying that the immersion was not intended to convey an understanding of the vision-impaired experience (or of the experience of disability in general), but to elucidate the functional challenges of spatial mobility with limited vision.



The residential threshold introduced attendees to a system of live, tactile QR codes (above right) which provided navigation instructions and spatial descriptions throughout the exhibition. The threshold itself was accessed by a tactile guide strip (above left) adjacent to a handrail with musical tiles embedded in its base (so that the pitch increased as you tapped them with a cane / approached the door).



The hospital corridor challenged attendees to find the correct patient room door by reading 3D-printed tactile signage (above right) and featured AI-generated landscape tiles (depicting the projected window views opposite), together with tactile guide strips.



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AI-ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

2025-Pres.

In the spring of 2025, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou and Dr. Luis Borunda co-organized and co-instructed an undergraduate research course about the impact of AI on the accessible design of cultural management spaces, including museums, heritage sites, and destination districts. The course, conducted under the umbrella of ICAT's IDPro ("interdisciplinary projects") program, built on work produced during the 2024-2025 AI-Accessibility seminar and included students of Marketing and Computer Engineering, evidencing the impact of Dr. Gipe-Lazarou's human-centered design teaching beyond Architecture and Design. The outcomes of the seminar were showcased in an immersive exhibition during the grand opening of Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus in Feb. of 2024. Interdisciplinary research in this area continued in the 2025-26 academic year, supported by a seed grant from the Pamplin College of Business, with Dr. Gipe-Lazarou as Co-PI.



Student work, on display at the Innovation Campus grand opening, includes a mobile phone app designed to provide vision-impaired users with customizable descriptions, navigation instructions, and alerts; which can be paired with Meta's Aria glasses for hands-free use (top row); together with product design ideas (bottom row) for more accessible tourist spaces (e.g. ergonomic handrails and tactile QR codes). The exhibition was attended by university leadership, alumni, donors, the state's elected representatives, and more than 1,000 members of the general public from within and beyond the northern Virginia and Washington D.C. areas.

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SUPPORTING MATERIAL

gipe-lazarou

BLIND DESIGN WORKSHOP

2022-2025

In the spring of 2022, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou initiated a collaboration between the Virginia Tech School of Architecture and the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), to organize a design workshop for vision-impaired learners from across the state of Virginia. The five-day workshop, which took place a fourth time this past spring with a fifth planned for 2026, is prepared each year by approx. 15 students of Architecture and Design whose prompt is to instruct the architectural design process in a non-visual way. The workshop takes place at the university's main campus in Blacksburg, VA, and hosts participants between the ages of 16 to 24, with varying types and degrees of vision-impairment. Student organizers earn 1 credit for preparing course material and overseeing the workshop. All funding is provided by DBVI, supporting the travel and lodging of a guest speaker and 4+ full-time employees, together with lodging, meals, activity fees, and workshop materials for all vision-impaired participants.



Acknowledgments: The BDW22-25 teams would like to thank the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), the Virginia Tech Creativity and Innovation District (CID), Chris Downey (Architecture for the Blind), Carmen Papalia, VMDO Architects, No So Studio, Michael Ermann, Kay Edge, Luis Borunda Monsivais, Joseph Cooley, and Ralisa Dawkins for their support.



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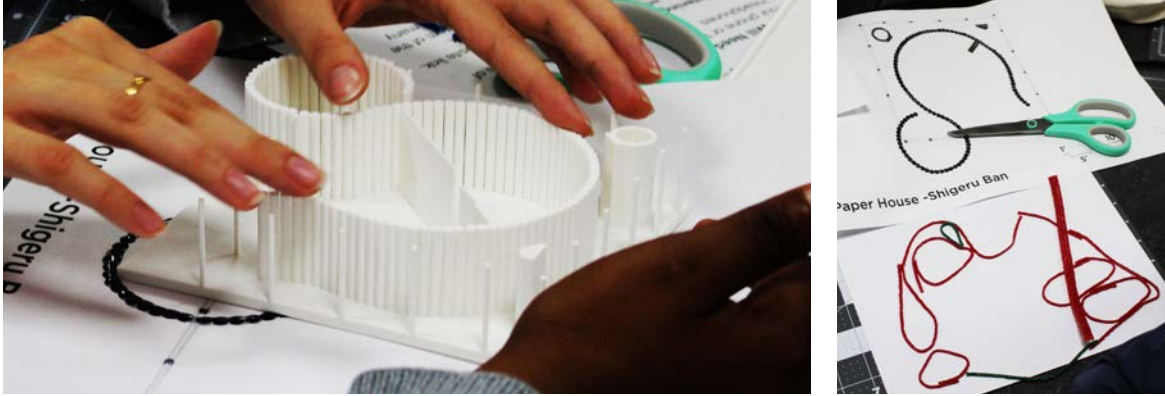
2026 ACSA NEW FACULTY TEACHING AWARD



BLIND DESIGN WORKSHOP

TACTILE TEACHING

In addition to serving as a career exploration opportunity for aspiring designers with vision impairment, the workshop provides student organizers with an opportunity to directly engage questions of accessibility by designing for and working with blind and vision-impaired individuals. This is accomplished through the preparation of teaching materials and instruction of activities which challenge their preconceptions about the sensory nature of space-making.



Tactile teaching materials supporting a BDW22 precedent study exercise: a vision-impaired participant interacts with a 3D-printed model of Shigeru Ban's "Paper House" and an embossed floor plan to create a wax-stick diagram of the building's program (above).



Tactile precedent models of variably-styled and textured building facades support the development of an urban site model (the BDW24 final project), for which each vision-impaired participant is given a plot of land fronting the same street and is asked to design the form and façade of a multi-story apartment, including the entrance, front yard, and sidewalk between their building and the curb (above).

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BLIND DESIGN WORKSHOP

ACCESSIBLE WORKFLOWS

Working together with Dr. Gipe-Lazarou, student organizers prepare and oversee learning activities whose instruction (i.e. not only the outcome) is non-visually accessible / multi-sensory.



Student organizers of BDW24 present and instruct an accessible design workflow to vision-impaired participants, which begins with the manual creation of prototype clay tiles, continues with 3D-scanning, and concludes with 3D-printing each tile at a smaller scale so that they can be used by participants on the creation of their urban site models.



BDW24 + 25 student organizers teach participants to deploy artificial intelligence (AI) by photographing their models, using AI-image generation to create renderings of each, then presenting them together with a description which can be accessed audibly via QR code.

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BLIND DESIGN WORKSHOP

REFLECTIONS



My experience through this workshop and the interaction that I had with the blind and vision-impaired community has drastically changed the way I think about space making. I think the architecture industry very much takes our vision for granted. Although we talk about acoustics and material throughout the design process, we orient our designs around vision-centric themes and aesthetics. Taking the time to really explore and learn about how blind and vision-impaired people experience the build environment helped highlight the other senses that make architecture a multi-sensory experience, not just a visual one."

– Isaiah Ho (undergrad. arch. student), BDW22 student organizer



This workshop was a fascinating opportunity for me to challenge, refine, and articulate my understanding of disability as it relates to architecture. As a hard-of-hearing person, I found myself relating to the students' perspectives and comparing them to the challenges I experience as a student with a disability. For me, interacting with the blind community wasn't a grandiose realization that other senses indeed matter. The workshop instead was an opportunity to reflect more broadly on how we can eliminate barriers for people with disabilities entering the profession of architecture, and how valuable the experiential knowledge of people with disabilities is to our understanding of design. There are reasons why disabled architects are statistically invisible in our field. Work needs to start happening now so that the blind community is given a fair chance to succeed. I hope that this workshop is what kickstarts it. It's only the beginning!"

– Matthew Schrage (undergrad. arch. student), BDW22-23 student organizer



Overall, I loved being part of the Blind Design Team. I hadn't fully realized the complexity and nuances of blindness until I experienced the exercises firsthand. Now, I find myself considering accessibility in every aspect of my work, thinking less about visual aesthetics and more about function, equity, and inclusivity. It also made me aware of how much we rely on sight, often without even realizing it. It was a valuable opportunity to work closely with my peers, learn from each other, and reflect on how design can genuinely improve lives. I believe everyone should experience this workshop, not just to understand blindness better, but to become more conscious of how thoughtful design can remove barriers and create dignity."

– Neharika Gupta (undergrad. arch. student), BDW25 student organizer

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ARCH. STUDIO

OBSERVATORY FOR THE BLIND

Each spring since 2023, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou's second-year, undergraduate architecture studio (7 credits) engages approx. 20 students in an eight-week human-centered design project, challenging them to create and present a nature observatory for / to vision-impaired leadership and visitors of the Burkeville Lodge for the Blind in Burkeville, VA. Their in-class preparation includes readings and short lectures about the sensory and social dimensions of design and guided interactions with and feedback from vision-impaired professionals and their final deliverables include a combination of physical models, tactile two-dimensional drawings, and interactive 1:1 details.

SYLLABUS_2024-2025

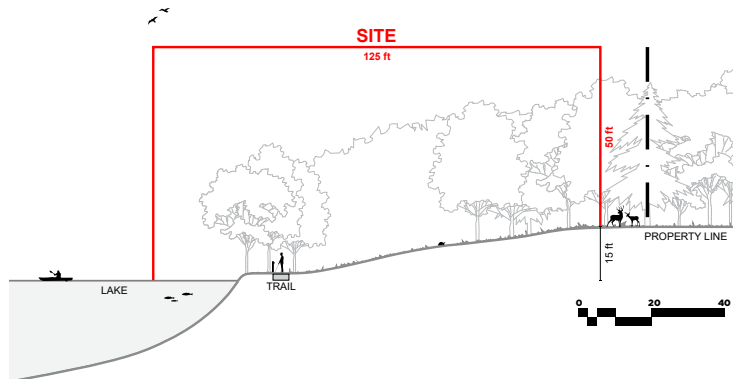
PROJECT DESCR.:

Design an observatory for the blind – an accessible, sheltered space which facilitates an immersive, non-visual experience of nature for visually-impaired vacationers and staff of the Burkeville Lodge.

The site is located along the western lakeshore of the Burkeville Lodge. From the front entrance of the Lodge, it takes approximately five minutes to walk to the site; wayfarers follow a stainless steel guide rail along an asphalt path which descends towards the eastern shore of the lake, cross a wooden footbridge to the other side, then turn left along a dirt hiking trail. The buildable area is 50 feet wide and 125 feet long, extending 25 feet over the lake, with a rising slope of 15 feet from the water line to the top of the site. The maximum height of any structure may not exceed 50 feet above the site's highest point.

Your design proposal must consolidate the following:

- Place to gather, with seating for at least 5 people;
- Place(s) to sit privately / individually and observe nature;
- Sheltered space (from insects and the elements);
- Non-visual cues for navigating through the space; and
- Spatial strategies for facilitating a non-visual experience of nature.



Thank you for such an excellent year. I've learned so much from you, all of which I know I will use well into the future. I really admire your concern not only for the quality of work produced, but also the quality of the process behind it. I am so passionate about architecture and you only added to that. I will cherish every memory I have of this studio and will really miss having you as a professor."

– Erin Harrigan (undergrad. arch. student), 2nd-year studio (2022-23)

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ARCH. STUDIO

DELIVERABLES

Unique to this project is the effect of tactile model-making on building form (students commit to and develop clear ideas about parti to maintain the non-visual comprehensibility of their designs); each proposal's attentiveness to structure and materiality; and the innovative suggestions for more engaging, multi-sensory building details. Featured below are a material section diagram, tactile floor plan, two railing prototypes (one featuring an indicative bump-out, the other an embedded bear paw and QR code), a stair which playfully reinforces proper cane usage (which is to tap the risers as you ascend) by creating music, and an ADA-compliant floor detail rendering perceptible (under foot and to a white cane) the separation between two interior spaces.



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SUPPORTING MATERIAL

ARCH. STUDIO

ON-SITE PRESENTATIONS

To conclude their project, students travel to Burkeville, Virginia, to present and receive feedback about their proposals to / from administrators and visitors of the Lodge.



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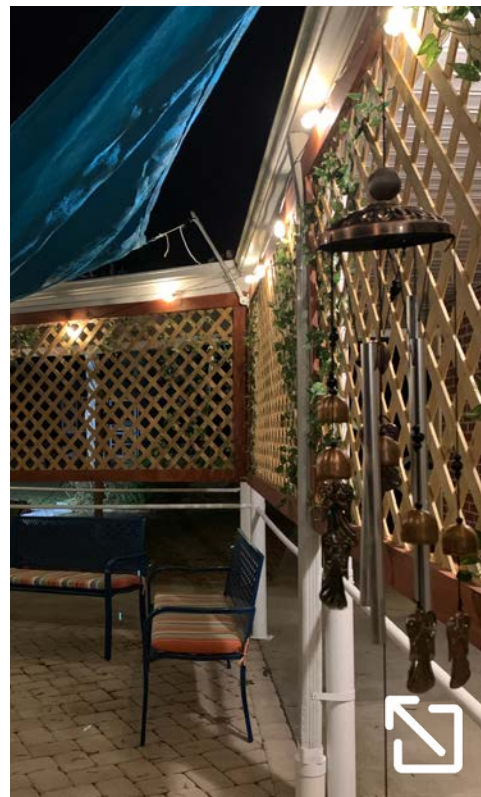
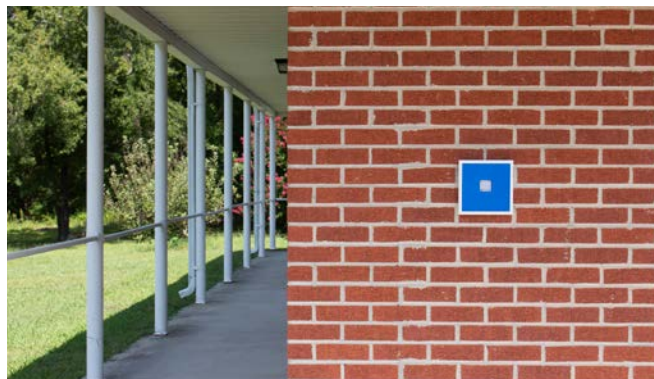
2026 ACSA NEW FACULTY TEACHING AWARD



ARCH. STUDIO

ENGAGEMENT GRANT

In the 2024-25 academic year, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou helped five students from his second-year undergraduate architecture studio win a student-led community-engagement grant. The team was awarded funds by the VT Engage: Center for Leadership and Service Learning, with additional support from ICAT and private donors, to work, under his supervision, with leadership of the Burkeville Lodge for the Blind in Burkeville, VA, to improve the safety, accessibility, and sensory engagement of a newly-constructed memory garden space. Building on their experience in studio, the students designed, built, and installed a fabric canopy, trellis walls, and planter box seating to better-enclose the space, together with tactile surfacing, tactile handrail additions, and 3D-printed QR code plaques to convey directional instructions and information about the Lodge.



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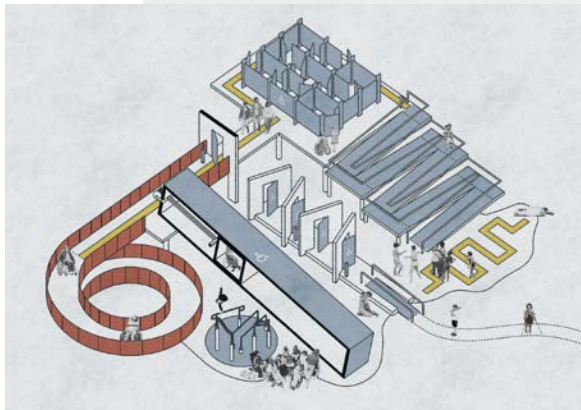
SUPPORTING MATERIAL

gipe-lazarou

THESIS

HONORS AWARDS

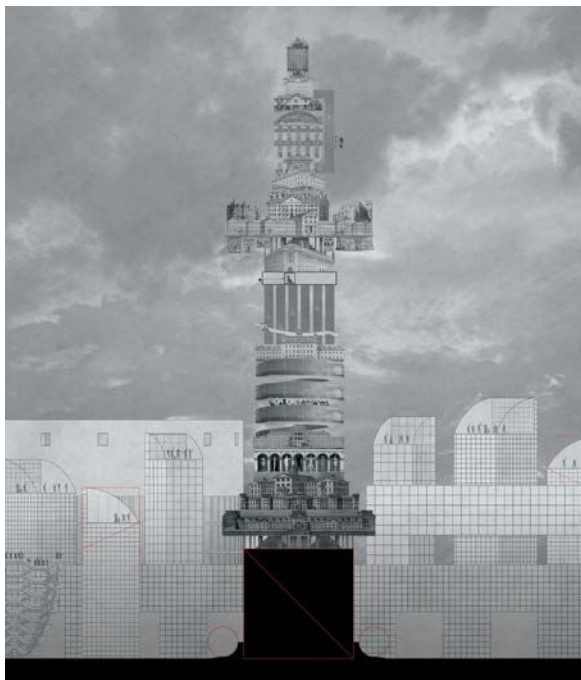
Dr. Gipe-Lazarou has consistently advised 7+ thesis students per year for the past four years (5+ undergrad., 2+ grad.), supporting projects focused on human-centered design and narrative theory. In the 24-25 academic year, Collin Caywood, whom he supervised as a committee member, won the graduate program's top thesis award. And in 21-22 and 22-23, his thesis advisees, Isaiah Ho and Matthew (Matt) Schrage, received the undergraduate program's top thesis award, selected each year from among 120 projects by external review. Matt's project, *Towards an Anti-Ableist Architecture* (excerpted below), presented a satirical narrative which drew on the history of accessibility "to confront the profession's ongoing complicity with the marginalization of disabled individuals." Dr. Gipe-Lazarou has supported / continues to support Matt's interest in disability studies beyond graduation, presenting a jointly-authored paper with him at the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) Intl. Conference in 2024, accepted for publication in a special issue of *arq* (Cambridge Univ. Press); and is currently editing a book-version of Matt's thesis which (as of writing) has received publication offers from Actar and ORO.



ACT VII: DREAMLAND: "Determined to reverse the damages caused by the Modulor architects, the Renegades graciously take it upon themselves to rescue the Mistakes from their pitiful condition. Digging through the architects' disposal sites, the Renegades reclaim the accessible forms that had been amputated during Liberation [ACT VI]. Through clever repurposing, they erect an accessible Dreamland."

The narrative's conclusion presents the unlikely outcome of the Modulors' (non-disabled individuals') attempt to accommodate all Mistakes (disabled individuals) in a single structure, a spectacular freak show at the center of the city.

ACT X: THE TOWER (the final act) reveals the paradoxical outcome of the Tower's continuous construction (icons of accessibility perpetually heaped one above another into the sky): "Now accommodating over a quarter of the city's population, The Tower has quickly expanded to a preposterous scale. It has become so inconceivably sublime that against all attempts to hide from it, the Modulors cannot escape its omniscient gaze. The Tower watches them at every waking moment, in every concealed crevice and corner. While the Modulors toil to no end to deny its inevitability, the Tower stands in total omnipotence over the city. They are trapped in an eternal state of paranoia."



2026 ACSA NEW FACULTY TEACHING AWARD

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EVALUATIONS

CORE TEACHING

Since Dr. Gipe-Lazarou began teaching at Virginia Tech in the fall of 2021, he has maintained an average score of 5.65 / 6 in his annual student evaluations of the combined, overall effectiveness of his core teaching responsibilities (second-year architecture studio, ideas-concepts-representations, and thesis). This can be compared to both the Department Average (5.19 / 6) and College Average (5.24 / 6) during the same period. Below are excerpts of student feedback from his 6-credit, second-year architecture studio at the conclusion of each academic year (Virginia Tech students retain the same studio professor between the fall and spring semesters) between 22-23 and 24-25.

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Spring 2025 VT Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)

Course: ARCH_2016_10996_202501: Architecture II-ARCH_2016_10996_202501

5 - 5A - Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor here:	
Andrew Gipe-Lazarou	
Response Rate	9/19 (47.37%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He's a very cool and chill person• I have learned so much from you in a short amount of time, thank you for being my professor.• Fall semester was amazing with the projects we did and the frequent discussions and pin ups in 007. However, spring semester didn't feel as put together. Blind design permitted no time for studio work or discussions and we did nothing in studio for 2 weeks which was a huge break and to jump right in with the bus stop coffee shop project with only a week of actual ideation didn't permit iterations or in depth research. Maybe there can be a way to manage time for both classes.• Highly recommended him to first-year architecture students that were asking questions about the work we had done in the studio.• Andrew, I love you so much and I am so so appreciative for your care and understanding of our wellbeing. You've been a great professor and I've learned so many technical skills through you and the thesis students. I'll miss being in your studio but I'll be sure to drop by and say hi every once and a while.• It has been an extraordinary year. I will really miss this studio.• Andrew was a joy to have, I appreciate all the freedom he gave us to work and believe it taught us a sense of autonomy and reinforced being able to work at your own pace.	

7) blind design workshop (overview)

8) blind design workshop (tactile teaching)

9) blind design workshop (accessible workflows)

10) blind design workshop (student reflections)

Spring 2024 VT Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)

Course: ARCH_2016_10963_202401: Architecture II-ARCH_2016_10963_202401

5 - 5A - Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor here:	
Andrew Gipe-Lazarou	
Response Rate	7/16 (43.75%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Andrew has been an exceptional mentor and guide this year, and his feedback is always very kind but also instructive. His consistent light-hearted demeanor is always greatly appreciated.• I appreciate that Andrew is considerate of our work outside of studio. He always asks us what our workload is like and is understanding of deadlines. I cannot express enough how much I appreciated this as a student.• slay king• Really respectable, understanding, informative, and always willing to ask questions if he is unsure of information.• Professor has both professional and theoretical experience in architecture and is able to utilize both understandings in order to teach. He also has niche interests that can be applied to a surprising number of circumstances, with Lovecraft, the backrooms, and ancient Greece all being troves of inspiration for lessons taught. Most importantly, he is invested in the success of his students and never loses his patience or slacks off. After a rough first-year professor, he quite literally saved my interest in architecture, as I had decided that if this semester was worse than the first two, I'd quit my major and do something else.	

11) architecture studio (observatory project)

12) architecture studio (deliverables)

13) architecture studio (on-site presentations)

14) architecture studio (engagement grant)

15) thesis (honor awards)

Spring 2023 VT Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)

Course: ARCH_2016_10951_202301: Architecture II-ARCH_2016_10951_202301

5 - 5A - Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor here:	
Andrew Gipe-Lazarou	
Response Rate	9/19 (47.37%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Andrew is the best ever• Great teacher! I thoroughly enjoyed being in his class and would 100% do it again.• Andrew is awesome. He does a great job of matching people's energies. He encourages us to express ourselves and our opinions. If we have a test or school-wide social event outside of class, he is flexible in our studio schedule. He has pushed back pinups, altered project requirements, and removed an end-of-year exercise to give us more time to work on our final group project.• Andrew has been a great professor and I hope to take course with him in the future.• I think that Andrew is a great professor, and I would totally take his studio again.• Super great professor that I will certainly miss. Andrew was a friend for all of us too• He is one of the best professors that I have encountered in this school. His approach to learning was truly helpful for anyone who was willing to learn. He pushed all students to be the best they could be and to experiment with as much as they could as a young student. He truly cares about all of his students and wants to help all of them get what they want out of architecture school. The studio was respected by him and in turn the studio respected him back, full of mutual respect and admiration. His perspectives on design for the visually impaired, and just accessible architecture, is something we can all learn from. I think he is a great asset to the Virginia Tech school of architecture. He embodies all the values that the school wants for their students and I think losing him as a professor would be a great loss for the entire school.	

16) evaluations (core teaching)

17) intersectional impacts (workshops)

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SUPPORTING MATERIAL

gipe-lazarou

INTERSECTIONAL IMPACTS

WORKSHOPS

Over the past 4 years, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou has extended the curricular impact of his collaborations with disability service organizations and professionals with disability. He has worked together with DBVI to design and oversee orientation and mobility (O+M) training for 45+ undergraduate and graduate students each year who attend his second-year studio (during the project described above), AI-Accessibility seminar, and Blind Design Workshops, and for his thesis students engaging in human-centered design projects. He has worked with the university's accessibility architect, Joseph Cooley, to provide students of advanced architecture studios critical feedback on ADA-compliant design. And, most recently, he invited / worked with blind performance artist, Davian (DJ) Robinson, to offer a 2-hour, immersive dance workshop (led by DJ) which challenged 20+ participating students of Architecture and Design to move and interact while blindfolded.



O+M training includes tutorials in tactile teaching methods and digital aids, simulations of different types and degrees of vision impairment (e.g. total blindness, tunnel vision, loss of central vision, blurred sight), and mobility training with a cane in and around the School.



In one exercise, DJ prepares a tactile diagram (above left) which the students must read, then recreate using their bodies (above right). Additional activities include exercises in echo-location, sound-source identification, and interpretive dance. Upon the conclusion of the workshop (which takes place in the Cube exhibition space), students remove their blindfolds and discuss the experience.

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INTERSECTIONAL IMPACTS

MISC.

Dr. Gipe-Lazarou also recently worked together with leadership of the Foundation for Rehabilitation Equipment and Endowment (F.R.E.E.) and the Universal Design (UD) Project to provide lecture-based and hands-on training about wheelchair use for 25+ second- and fifth-year Architecture students (featured below). The training will support a semester-long studio project (Fall 2025) focusing on human-centered design. Other teaching activities organized by Dr. Gipe-Lazarou, which have more broadly impacted the School's curriculum, have included guest lectures (funded by DBVI as part of the BDW) delivered by blind performance artist Carmen Papalia in 2023 and blind architect Chris Downey in the spring of 2022 and 2024 and attended by 200+ students each year; the 2023 school-wide second-year architecture competition, focused on an accessible, multi-sensory design brief; and 5+ guest reviews, lectures, and/or workshops per semester about accessible and inclusive design delivered by Dr. Gipe-Lazarou to students of other studios (graduate and undergraduate) in Architecture and Interior Design.



After an in-class demonstration / discussion about mobility devices and accessible infrastructure, Scott Pruett, founder of the UD Project and an experienced wheelchair user, leads an interactive 'roll-about' across campus (top) which challenges students to use ADA-compliant doors, ramps, and elevators, and non-compliant infrastructure like the steeply-graded access road to the School's first-floor, accessible entrance, which demands intense physical effort (bottom).

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SUPPORTING MATERIAL

gipe-lazarou

DISSEMINATION

AI-WORKSHOP MODEL

To expand the impact of his innovative teaching methods, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou has delivered invited lectures at other universities, and in support of national and state disability service organizations; presented at international conferences (including the 2022 Future Bodies Symposium, 2023 Including Disability Global Summit, and ACSA's 2025 Summer Conference and AI-Design Practices Conference); published in the prestigious, peer-reviewed journal, *Design Studies*; and, most recently, organized demonstrative, smaller-scale workshop sessions for aspiring vision-impaired and sighted designers, and practicing professionals at events like the National Federation of the Blind's Virginia state convention, the Kennedy Center's Leadership Exchange in Arts & Disability (LEAD), and the annual state AIA conference in Richmond, VA.



Student researchers of the AI-Accessibility project (Zixi Li, above right / Faith Lohr, bottom left) oversee a hands-on, model-making session at the 2024 State Convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in Norfolk, VA. The workshop session challenged vision-impaired attendees to create a space between two portals which facilitated navigation and provided a comfortable place to sit. Participants developed their design ideas using artificial intelligence (AI), soliciting suggestions for interior layouts and materials.

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RECOGNITIONS

2023-2025

For his pedagogical innovations in inclusive design education, Dr. Gipe-Lazarou has been recognized at the School, College, State, and National levels. He received the 2023 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award from the College of Architecture, Arts, and Design (AAD); the 2024 Diversity Achievement Award from the ACSA; the 2024 (inaugural) Sally Brown Excellence in Design Education Award from the Branch Museum of Design in Richmond, VA, and the 2025 Outreach Excellence Award from the School of Architecture. The Blind Design Workshop, in particular, was recognized in 2025 by U.S. Senator, Mark R. Warner (see below), who praised its impact as “enabling students to better understand the importance of creating accessible and multi-sensory spaces.”

MARK R. WARNER
VIRGINIA



UNITED STATES SENATOR
WASHINGTON, D.C.

January 28, 2025

I am pleased to extend my congratulations to you upon receiving the 2024 VAXDesign Sally Brown Excellence in Education Award from The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design last year.

This honor recognizes your tremendous achievements as an educator. During your time as an Assistant Professor, you have prepared Virginia Tech students for their careers by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Your work to create the Blind Design Workshop has been particularly impactful as it allows individuals with vision impairments to explore careers in design fields and enables your students to better understand the importance of creating accessible and multi-sensory spaces. I commend you for helping your students gain new perspectives and tools that will be beneficial to them in their future endeavors.

On this important occasion, I am pleased to join with your family, friends, and colleagues in saluting your accomplishments and wishing you success in all of your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator

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