

STUDENTS CATCH TIMBERFEVER

Cross-disciplinary competition promotes collaboration

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SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NETWORK

In a competition worthy of reality TV, eight teams of architectural science and civil engineering students from Ryerson University were handed a design brief outlining the type of structure they had to design and build — all with a limited supply of lumber and within the next 36 hours.

The task of the second annual TimberFever Design-Build Competition (www.TimberFever.com): to build accessible structures that would provide urban refuge and would be tested for structural integrity and architectural merit by a team of professional engineers and architects. In the end, however, the greatest outcome might have been their ability to tear down the walls that traditionally separate their academic disciplines.

COLLABORATION

In addition to promoting the use of wood and design in construction, encouraging students from the two disciplines to collaborate on a project was among the primary goals of the event. It's sponsored by David Moses of Moses Structural Engineers Inc., whose portfolio

includes the Art Gallery of Ontario addition.

"In the real world, you need to collaborate with all sorts of different professionals. It's one of the things new graduates are lacking and through this event we gave them some exposure to that," Moses says. "Giving students hands-on work experience is another important element of the competition. A lot of recent graduates have never picked up a tool and don't understand how to physically build things."

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Third-year architectural science student and event co-chair Abhishek Wagle embraced the challenge. "From our initial meeting, we talked about three core values: creating a collaborative mentality in students early on in their education; giving students the ability to build things with their hands so they're not just drawing but also using tools and wood to build structures; and to promote wood as a building material, which is a central material to the Canadian environment."

Moses brought in Carpenters Local 27 to help the competing teams construct their structures, while also

advising them on best building practices and ensuring they used power tools safely. "Students are also learning how to communicate with the trades ... when they're on a construction site," he says.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Building relationships is key, says Local 27 president Mike York. "We're very glad to participate in the competition because it provides a chance for our next-generation carpenters to work with the next generation of architects and engineers. These folks are going to be working together in the same

industry for the rest of their careers so it's a good step to building that relationship early on."

Students appreciated the opportunity to work with members of the carpenters' union. "They were definitely absorbing as much information as they could and asking tons of questions," Wagle says.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The competition is an example of experiential learning. "The fact that students get to engage with materials, collaborate and learn from others and put

their ideas into action is huge," says architecture professor Vincent Hui. "An engineering student could talk to an architecture student: 'That's a really cool idea; let me figure out if I can make it happen.'"

"An architecture student could talk to an engineering

student about whether their concept was possible. And better yet, the carpenters' union also offered advice," he says. "That kind of collaboration is very fruitful ... This event is about accomplishing something you can't accomplish in a library or a classroom. That's enriching."



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