

## Department of Architecture Students » University of Hartford

Building as Prayer: Campus Sukkah » University of Hartford » West Hartford, Connecticut



This project explores the connection between design, making, and prayer in the design and construction of a campus sukkah by architecture students, working in collaboration with the campus Hillel Jewish student organization.

The sukkah walls are designed so that they can be easily assembled with repetitive units that can be demounted and stored for next year's holiday. In Judaism the numbers 6, 12, and 18 are sacred, so the students incorporated them into demountable units 18 inches square, which had depths of 6, 12, and 18 inches. When assembled into a wall, these square niches are open to receive gifts and offerings for the holiday, and they are adorned with graffiti (another sukkah tradition) that was laser cut. The sukkah wall units were constructed by students weeks before final assembly on campus.

The work was completed by students and faculty of Jewish, Islamic, Christian, agnostic, or atheistic backgrounds, but all seemed to engage the project in the spirit of construction as a form of prayer. As 150 individual plywood units were fabricated, transported, and assembled, the work took on a repetitive nature, which some students and faculty likened to prayers and chants. Prayers were offered at the beginning and end of the two days of construction.

During construction, a Roman Catholic student remarked that he felt that he didn't need to attend Mass that day because he saw his sukkah work a form of worship. A practicing Muslim student asked to help because she had just received word that her grandmother had passed away in Bangladesh. She felt alone, and wanted to help construct this space for Jewish ritual as a

way to pray for her departed grandmother. The process of designing and making architecture can take on the spiritual dimensions of prayer, that in fact the act of prayer and the repetitive nature of building construction offer ways of transcending the everyday and accessing the spiritual.

### Jury Comments

*The process of design and construction of this sukkah is modeled on prayer. This college-community project brought people of different faiths together, and the act of building was a very important part of the project: prayer in the context of community, and community amid the context of prayer, which is the essence of Hillel.*

#### Designers

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#### Client

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