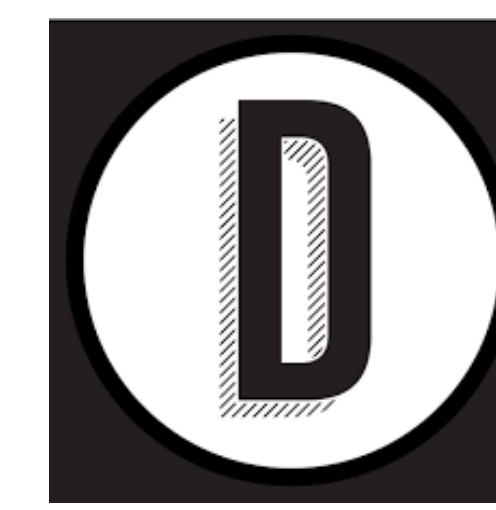
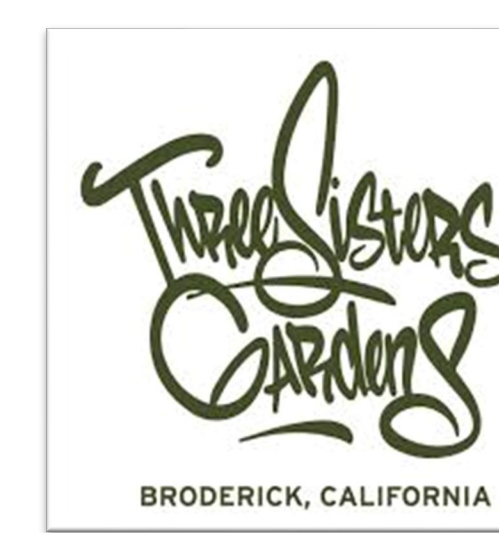


2026 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SHOWCASE

Supporting Food Sovereignty in West Sacramento through Community Engaged Design

Shalini Agrawal with Three Sisters Garden

<https://www.3sistersgardens.com>



SACRAMENTO STATE

Project Description

Three Sisters Garden is a non-profit in West Sacramento that brings together community members to cultivate food as life. Their goal is to give back to the community by inspiring and empowering youth through gardening - teaching them how to grow, harvest and distribute organic vegetables in their local area.

In this core foundational studio, Design students engaged with the founders of Three Sisters Garden to gain a deeper understanding of the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the West Sacramento community. The learned about the realities of operating in a food desert, sustaining workforce development initiatives, and managing food distribution programs. This real-world context strengthened their professional skills in translating community needs into thoughtful design solutions as they developed proposals for an outdoor kitchen to support programming and youth training.



Experiential Learning for Career Readiness & Civic Impact

1. Supporting Career Readiness and Professional Skill Development

Students listened to organizational needs of a local nonprofit organization, developed proposals, and delivered formal presentations. They strengthened career-ready skills including communication, site analysis, iterations and problem-solving. Students were able to see themselves as capable of contributing meaningfully to mission-driven organizations.

2. Developing Civic Engagement and Social Awareness

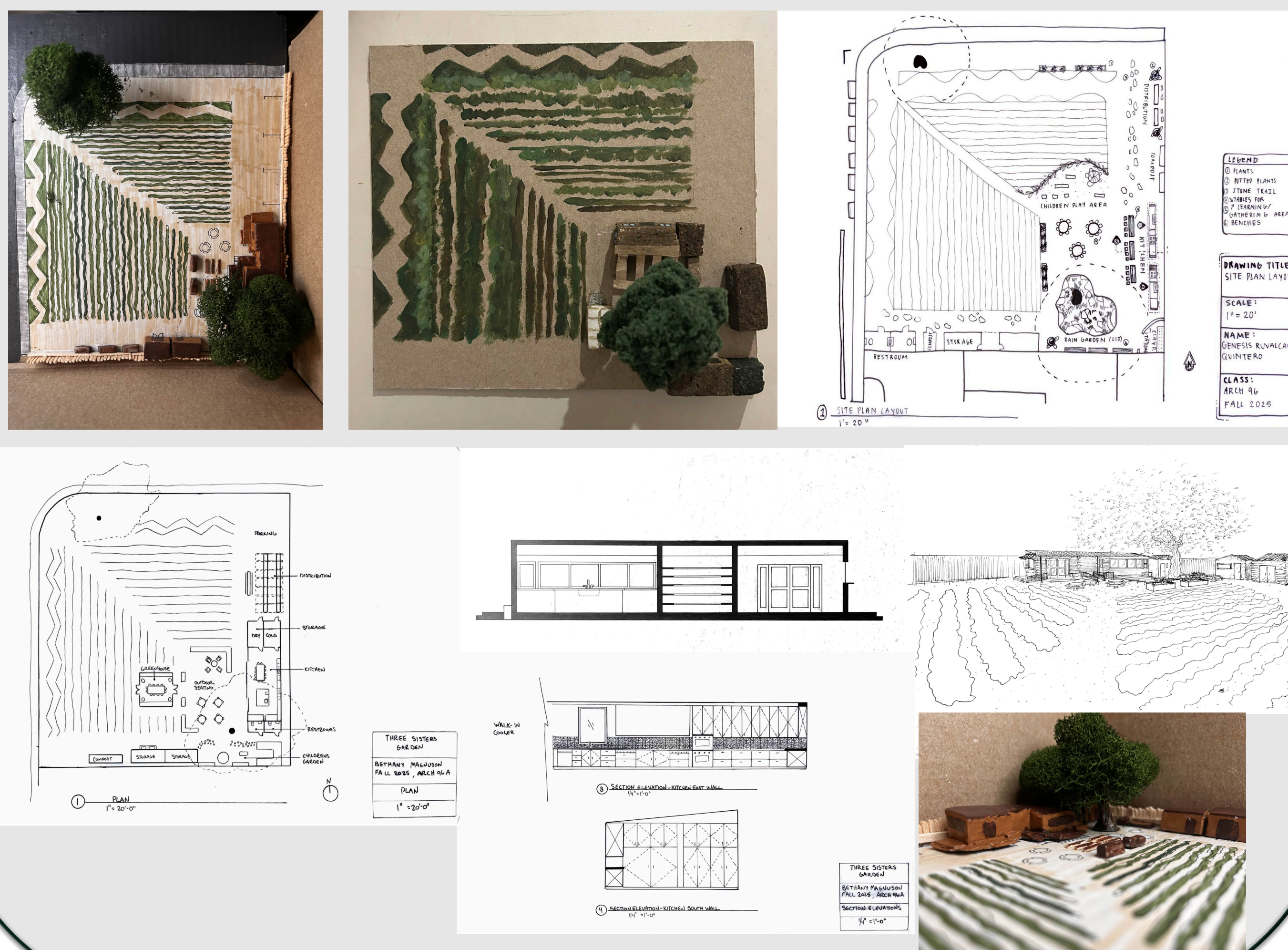
Learning about barriers to food access and community-led solutions promoted empathy-driven analysis and understanding. Students began to see design not only as aesthetic production, but as a tool for advancing equitable access, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship. Students connected their disciplinary skills to broader social issues around food sovereignty and increased their interest in future community-engaged and socially responsive work.

3. Operating from an Asset-Based Framework

Students learned about the organization's existing assets: community gardening, cultural knowledge, land stewardship practices, and workforce development initiatives. This reinforced respect for community expertise and positioned students as partners and learners.

4. Advancing Equity in Access to Experiential Learning

By embedding this project within a required course, all students were introduced to this experiential community engagement opportunity. Working directly with a community-based organization serving historically under-resourced populations encouraged students to consider engaging communities in the design processes and future careers.



Community Impact

The Three Sisters Garden's mission and work, which gives back to the community by inspiring and empowering youth through gardening, and teaching them how to grow, harvest and distribute organic vegetables locally, was supported and amplified with visual representations of an outdoor teaching kitchen and community gathering space. The partner received a range of design ideas for how the garden site could be utilized to meet and expand their needs, which supports their vision of bringing 50 community gardens to the Sacramento area.



Career Readiness/Civic Impact Program or Project Highlight(s)

Under the guidance of one faculty member and 3 community partner leaders, this project engaged 10 students in the fall and 20 students in the spring. Students evaluated site conditions to develop designs for an outdoor teaching kitchen, created models and drawings to explain their design, and presented their designs to the community partners at their site.



Campus Community Impact

Students learned about social, economic, and environmental challenges and directly applied design concepts to these real community challenges. They translated these insights into design proposals for an outdoor kitchen to support community programming and youth job training.

This process required collaboration, research synthesis, stakeholder engagement and client presentation. Students demonstrated deeper comprehension because they were designing *with* community context in mind, not in abstraction. In addition, students learned with and from each other in student-led critiques of their design.

