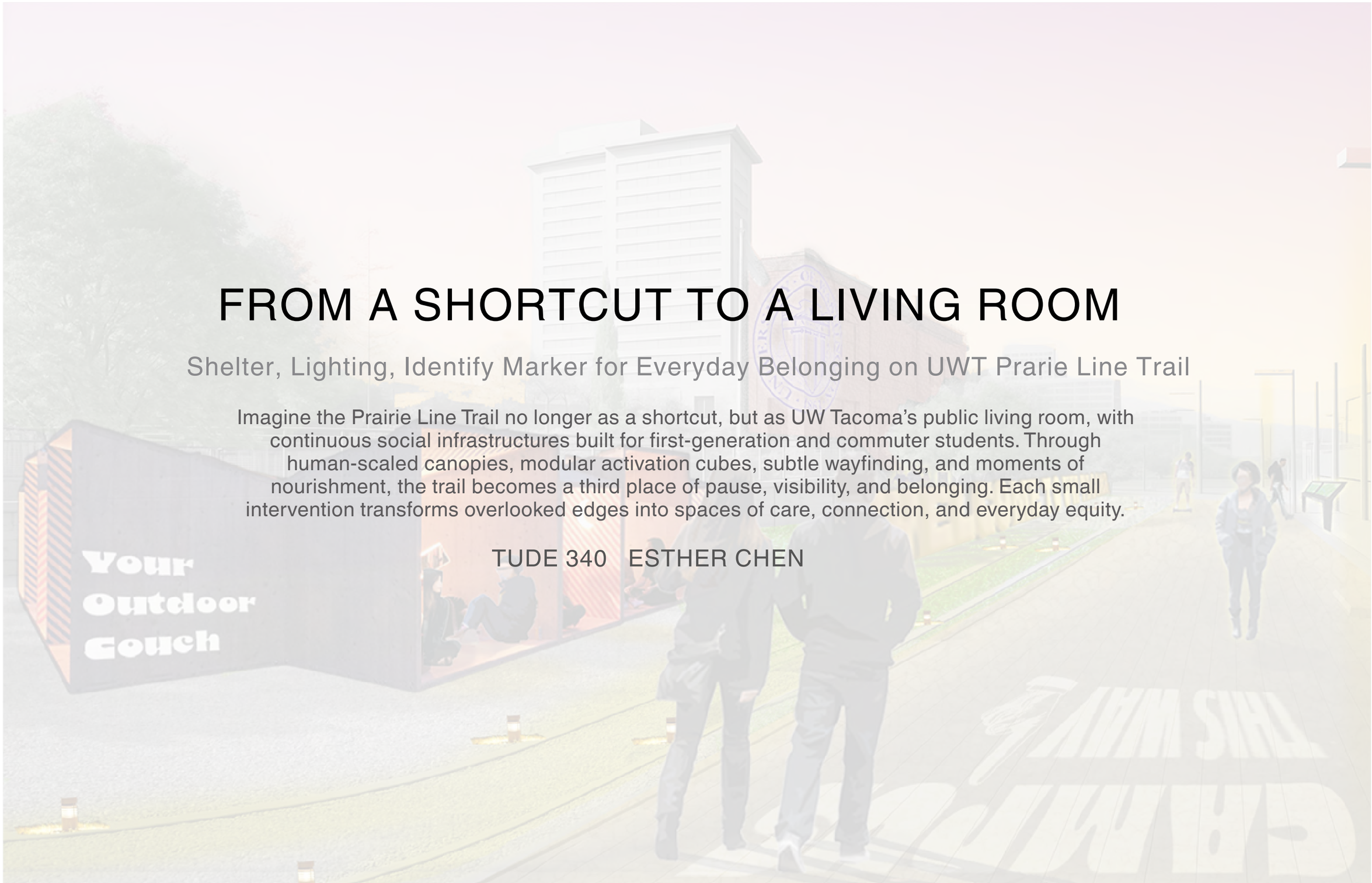


FROM A SHORTCUT TO A LIVING ROOM

Shelter, Lighting, Identify Marker for Everyday Belonging on UWT Prarie Line Trail

Imagine the Prairie Line Trail no longer as a shortcut, but as UW Tacoma's public living room, with continuous social infrastructures built for first-generation and commuter students. Through human-scaled canopies, modular activation cubes, subtle wayfinding, and moments of nourishment, the trail becomes a third place of pause, visibility, and belonging. Each small intervention transforms overlooked edges into spaces of care, connection, and everyday equity.

TUDE 340 ESTHER CHEN

OVERVIEW

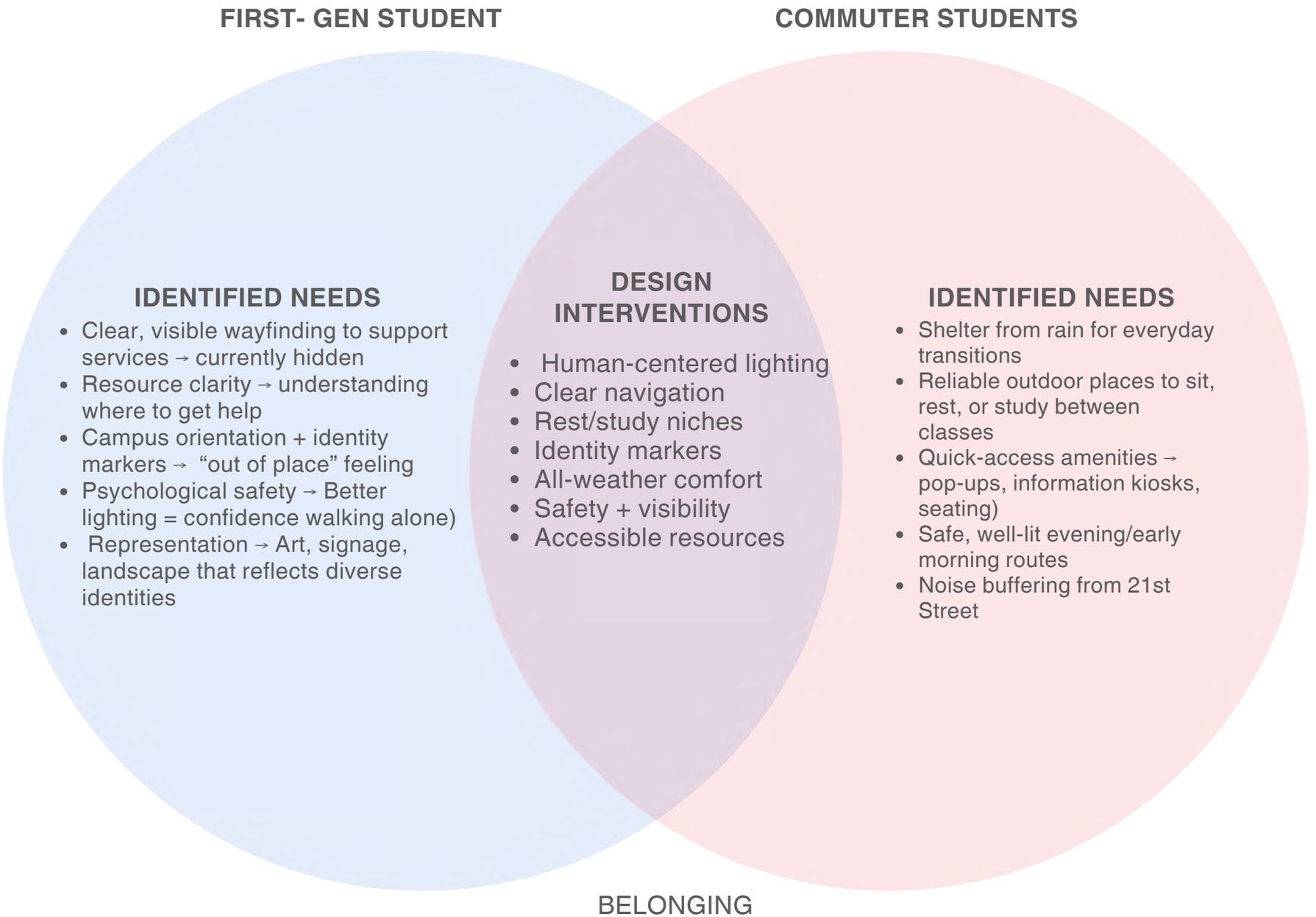
01 SITE ANALYSIS
SWOT Analysis + Sun and Wind path Analysis

02 DESIGN PRECEDENTS
8 case studies

03 CONCEPTUAL DESIGN SITE PLAN
conceptual plans + core internventions

04 SITE RENDERINGS
before and after

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN DIAGRAM:
HOW THESE ALL TIES TOGETHER



BELONGING

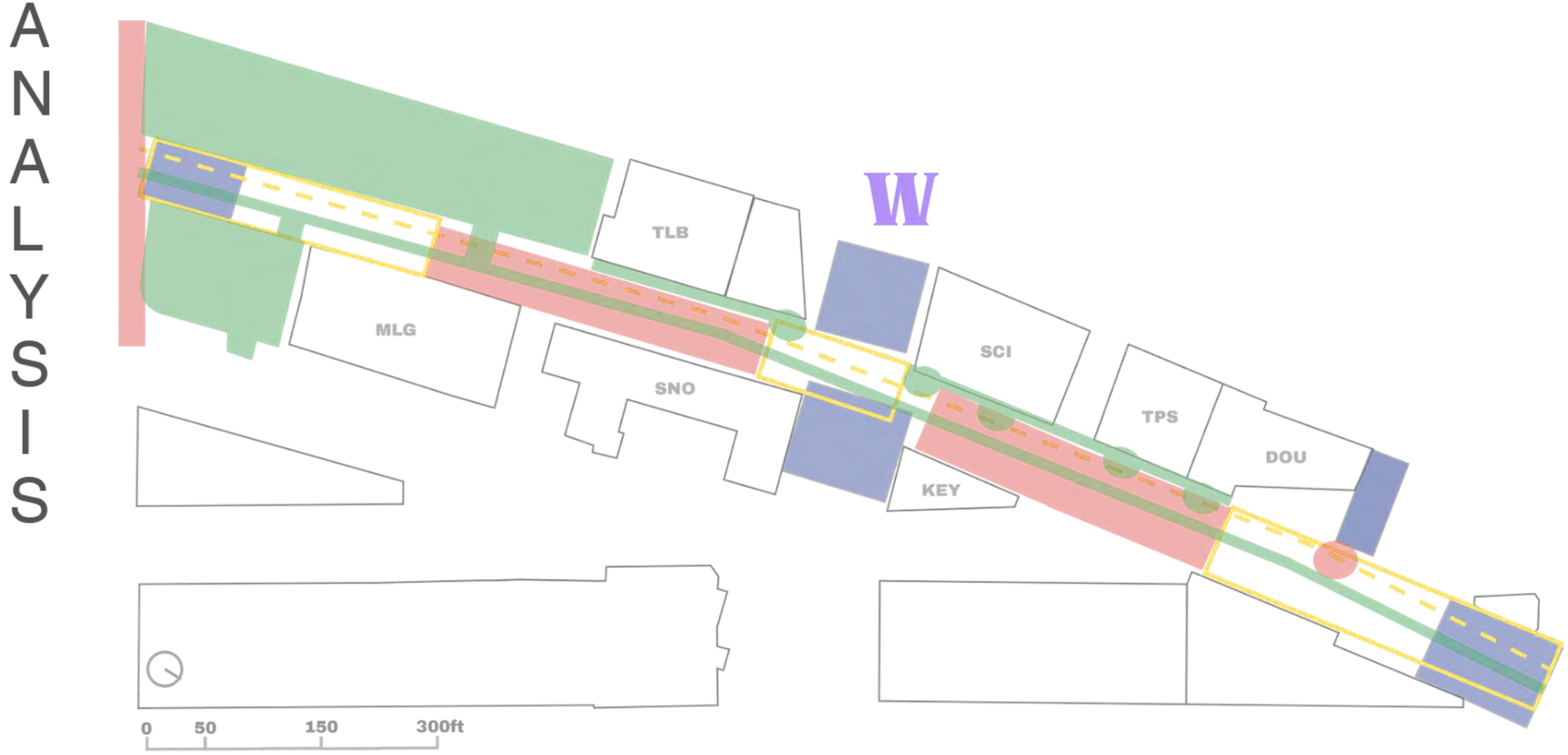
From a Shortcut → to a Living Room

01 SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT Analysis overview

S W O T

A N A L Y S I S



STRENGTHS

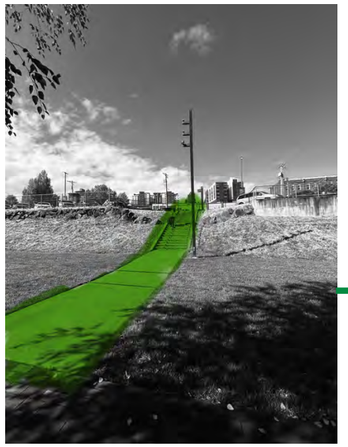
WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

My design would be focusing on first-generation and commuter students. “53% of UW Tacoma students are first-generation”, who are both low-income and the first in their families to attend university experience time poverty and space poverty in a way other students don't. As the Prairie Line Trail is currently just a "path" for them. I wish to transform the place into their "third place” on campus that fosters a sense of belonging and ownership.

SWOT ANALYSIS
STRENGTHS

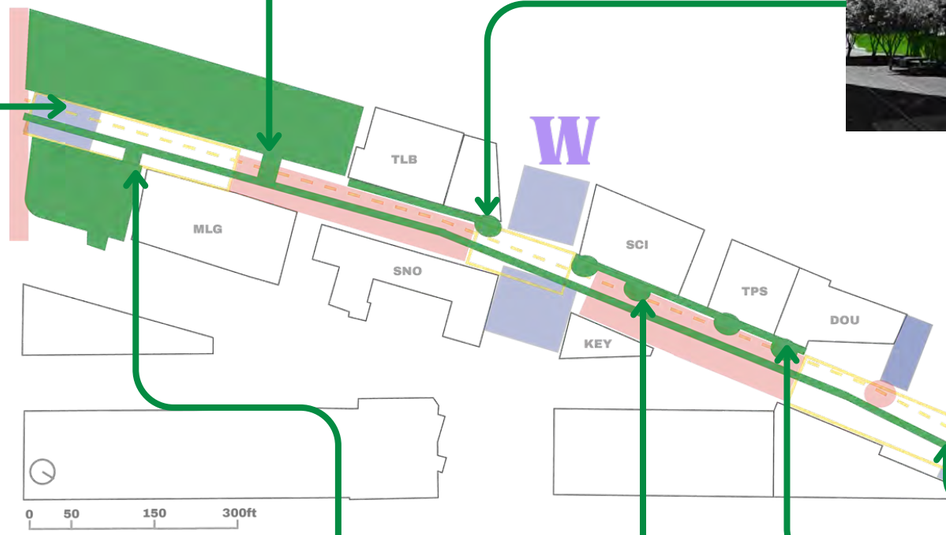


S6 Essential Path

Route that one must take if they park their car parks at It is a route that one must take if parking at Tioga and Cragle Lot.

S1 Foundation for Identity & Ownership

Existing artwork and historical elements offer a strong, non-generic foundation to build a UWT-specific identity that affirms student belonging.



S2 Natural Gathering Anchor

The existing direct path is the most time-efficient daily route for students parking off-campus (Tioga/Cragle Lots), providing a valuable base for all interventions

S5 Primary Linearity

The existing direct path is the most time-efficient daily route

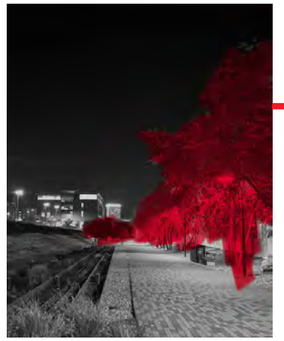
S4 Essential Path

Route that one must take if they park their car parks at It is a route that one must take if parking at Tioga and Cragle Lot.

S3 Zero-Cost Mental Recess

The linear trail is inherently a free, accessible zone for de-stressing (a "place to breathe"), which is a critical non-monetary resource for financially stressed students.

SWOT ANALYSIS
WEAKNESSES



W4 Safety Barrier from Poor Illumination

IInconsistent lighting and blind spots create a perceived safety barrier, actively discouraging crucial evening/early morning use and increasing anxiety (Time Poverty).

W6 Loud Traffic Noise

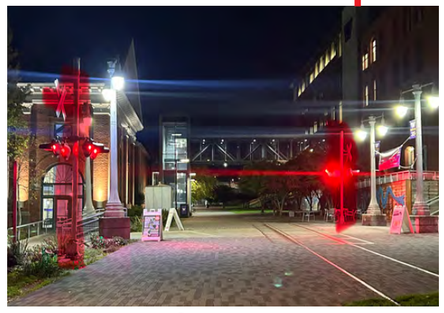
Unmitigated noise from 21st Street traffic interferes with the trail's ability to provide a calm, focused respite space, forcing students to seek quieter, often indoor and non-free alternatives.

W1 Zero All-Weather Utility

The complete lack of overhead shelter renders the trail unusable for stationary activities (studying, resting, waiting) during heavy rain, exacerbating Space Poverty.

W2 Resource Disconnection

Vital student support offices (like financial aid and wellness) are spatially hidden (tucked in MAT Building), reinforcing the "hidden curriculum" and forcing inefficient navigation for first-gen students.



W5 Hostile Coloration

The existing red/eerie color of certain lighting (as visually evidenced on the trail) creates an involuntary psychological association with danger, warning, or exclusion.

W1.1 Zero All-Weather Utility

The lack of overhead shelter renders the trail unusable for stationary activities during heavy rain, severely exacerbating Space Poverty.

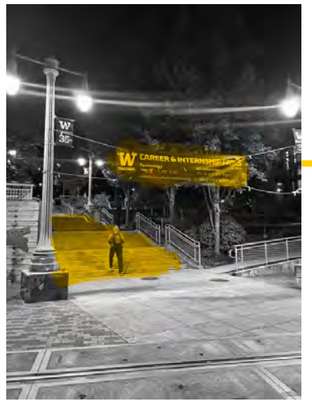
W3 Visual Clutter

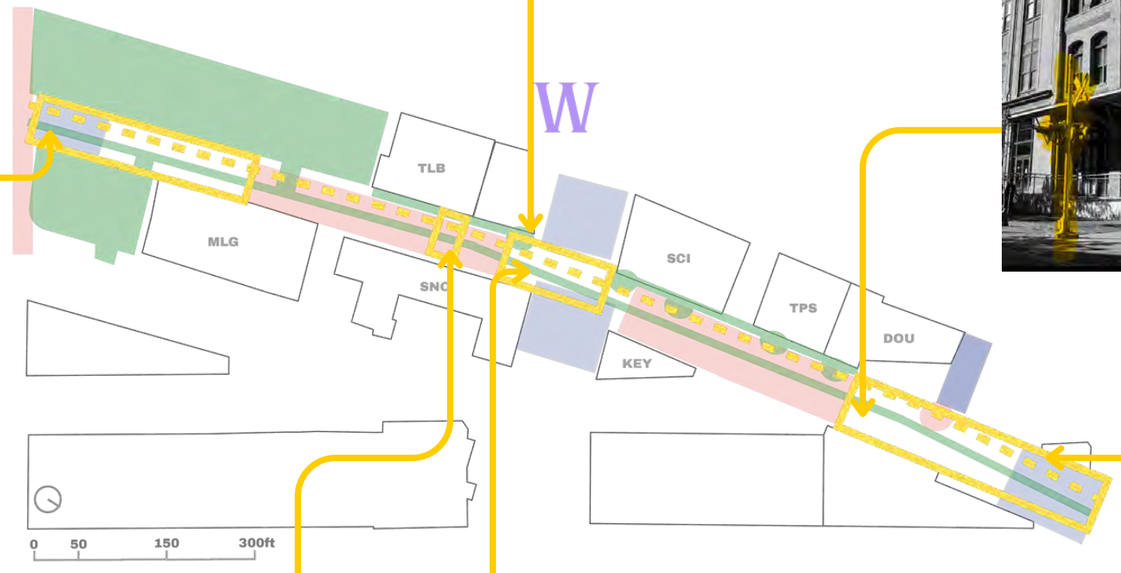
The trail's historical assets and original rail elements are not clearly described or integrated into wayfinding. These features read as visual clutter or unexplained relics, adding stress and failing to foster the intended sense of historical ownership

SWOT ANALYSIS
OPPORTUNITIES

06 Artifact Activation & Identity Markers

Use overhead fabric banners and lighting Structures to support bold, oversized typographic wayfinding that announces the UWT students' identity and belonging.



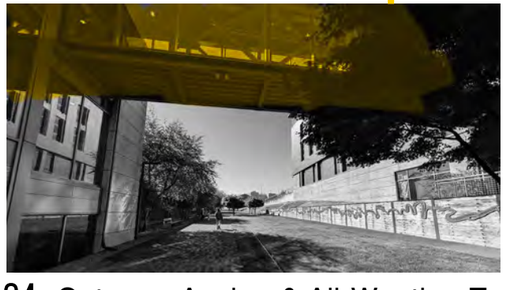


01 Integrated Resource Kiosks

Install branded, modular kiosks and overhead wayfinders at access points. Opportunities to place resource kiosks near building entrances.

05 The Commuter Utility Pavilion

Design a Dome/Canopy Structure at the 21st St. Anchor with Acoustic Mitigation. Construct a permanent, high-quality pavilion at the convergence point.



04 Gateway Anchor & All-Weather Transition

Utilize the bypass underside as a continuous, lit, and protected gateway. Treat the area directly beneath the overhead bypass as a permanent, covered transition zone.

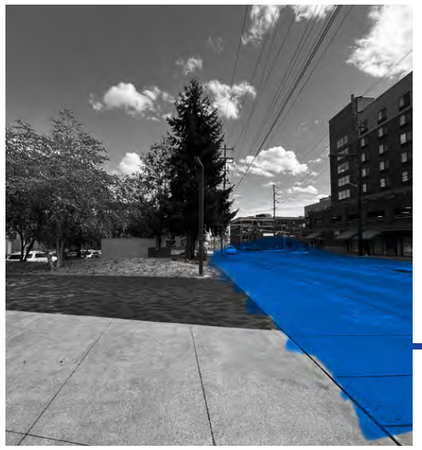
03 Multi-Scale Illumination System

Implement a Multi-Layered, Human-Centered Lighting System. Retrofit existing poles with large-scale, overhead Wayfinder Banners (LED Fabric) to announce the trail's presence.

02 Highlighting Prarie Line Trail

Implement linear lighting that can become a continuous navigational ribbon that clearly guides the night-time user from one access point to the next.

SWOT ANALYSIS
THREATS



T6 Unclear Boundary Definition

Without clear, intentional design along the trail's edges the boundary of where the trail ends, the PLT fails to establish a strong, unified sense of boundary and control.

T3 Erosion of Central Campus Identity

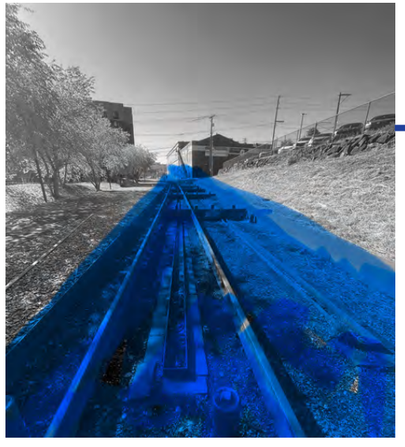
Aggressive development of the PLT risks visually eclipsing the existing "W" sign and the traditional central spine through oversized structures.

T1 Unsafe Seclusion

The unprogrammed blue zones with dense plantings or steep slopes could become areas of actual or perceived danger at night, regardless of how well the main path is lit.

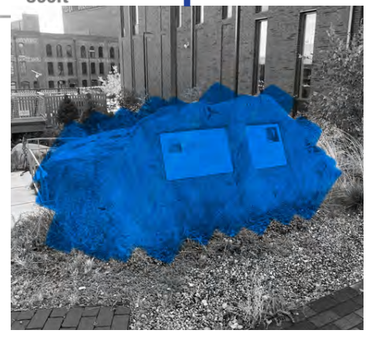
T2 Cultural Erasure through Relocation

Any attempt to relocate or disrespect established artwork will risks of being perceived as cultural erasure.



T5 Unprogrammed Nature as a Barrier

If the natural elements in the blue zones (e.g., dense shrubbery, required stormwater features) are not designed for access, they will be perceived as barriers rather than assets.



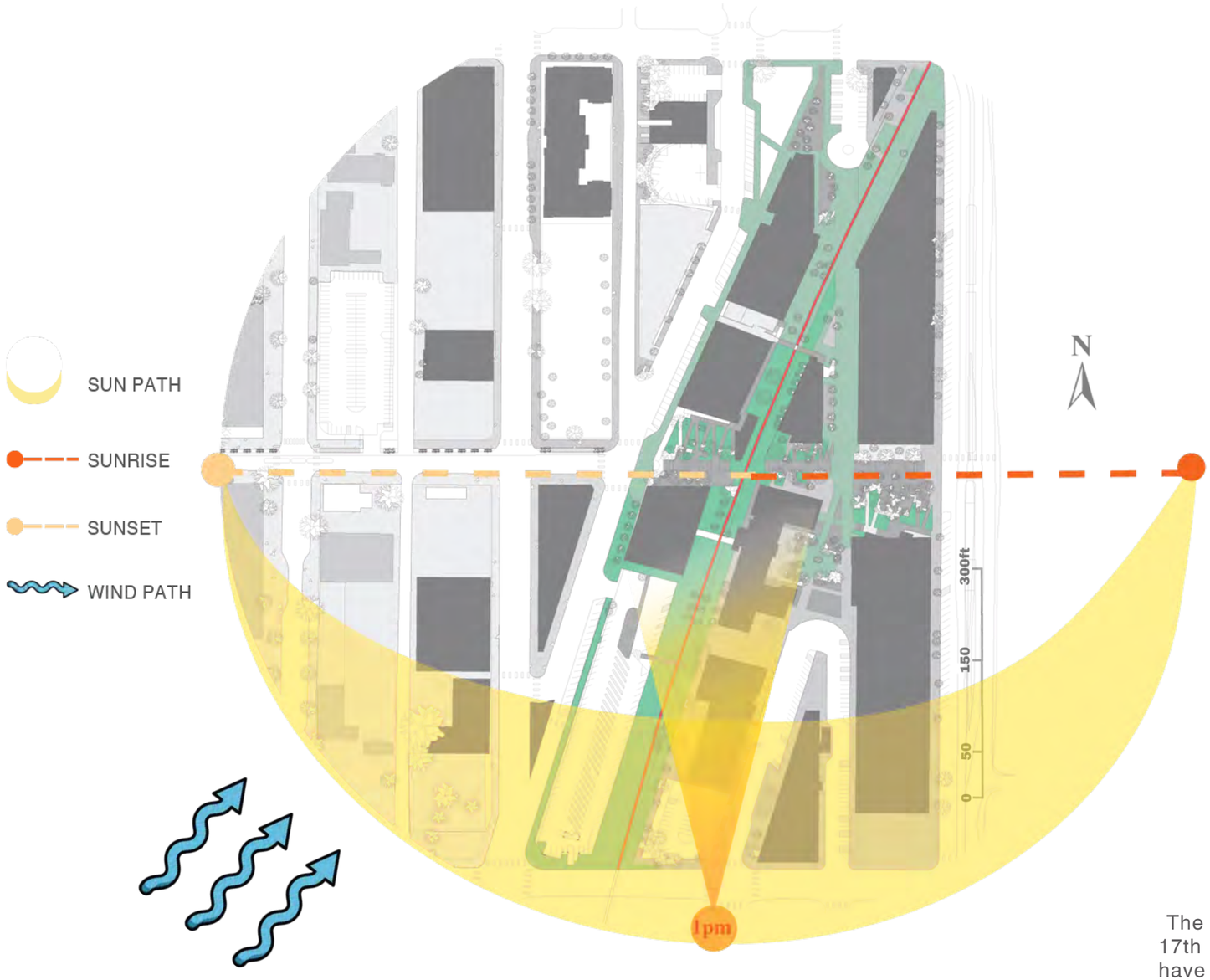
T4 Monumentalism Over Function

Prioritizing the current, untouchable symbolic form of the heritage rock over student utility creates a direct hostility to use.

SUN AND WIND PATH ANALYSIS Summer solstice: June 21st, 2025

Wind Data - Western Regional Climate Center. (n.d.). CLIMAT summary: Tacoma, WA (Station WA24233). Desert Research Institute.

Sun Path - suncalc.org. (n.d.). Sun position and sunlight phases calculator.



The sun path shows strong southern exposure between 17th and 21st Streets shows that the idea is perfect to have shaded seating, solar lighting, and vegetation that softens glare.

Prevailing south-west winds carry noise from 21st Street, so landform buffers and canopies at the south end can block sound and make the trail comfortable year-round, a potential outdoor study corridor even in poor weather

01

2004 ATLANTA, GA

ATLANTA BELTLINE

Leo Alvarez (Perkins&Will, Lead Designer) et al.

The Atlanta BeltLine reimagines a 22-mile abandoned railway into an equitable green corridor connecting 45 diverse neighborhoods. Its micro-level design emphasizes continuity through materials, by using durable granite and concrete paving. While celebrating difference through “Character Rooms” that express each area’s cultural identity. Linear parks, native meadows, and transit corridors interweave along the path, offering a rhythm of pause and motion. I selected this precedent because the PLT should adopt a signature material that makes it obvious the trail belongs to the campus and to everyone who uses it, encouraging pride and stewardship.

American Society of Landscape Architects. (2024). The Atlanta BeltLine. ASLA Professional Awards. https://www.asla.org/2024awards/9643.html

Inclusive Mobility

Social Movement

Busniess Activity

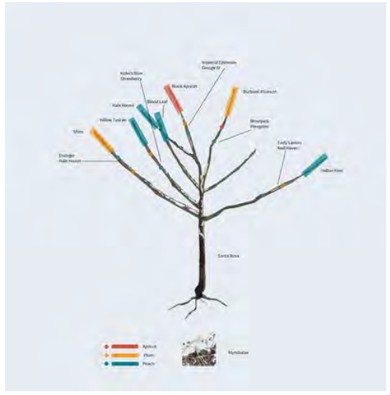
Leisure

02

2008 SYRACUSE, NY

TREE OF 40 FRUIT - TREE 75

Sam Van Aken (Syracuse University)



The Tree of 40 Fruit by Sam Van Aken is a living artwork grafting 40 stone-fruit varieties onto one tree, symbolizing diversity, resilience, and shared growth. Each spring it bursts into multicolored blossoms, later offering plums, peaches, and cherries for anyone to pick. I'm using this precedent because it turns public art into something you can taste. If we planted a similar tree on the Prairie Line Trail, low-income, first-generation commuters could grab fruit on their way to and from class, turning a simple route into a place of care, belonging, and daily nourishmen, along with a glimpse of joy when it comes to foraging.

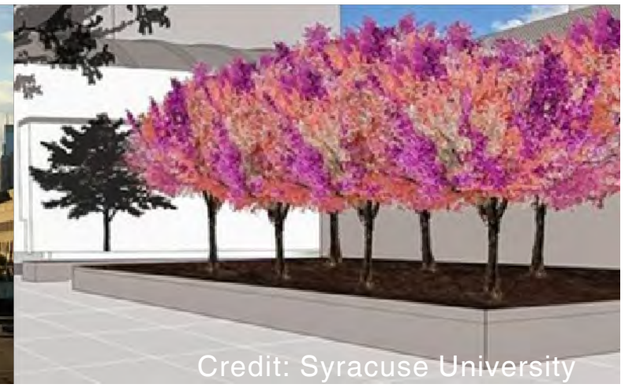
Syracuse University Art & Architecture. (n.d.). Tree of 40 Fruit. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://art.grace.syr.edu/poi/tree-of-40-fruit#:~:text=The%20Tree%20of%2040%20Fruit,Art%20Professor%20Sam%20Van%20Aken.

Blending Art with Landscape

Student Involvent

Seasonality

Conceptual Rendering

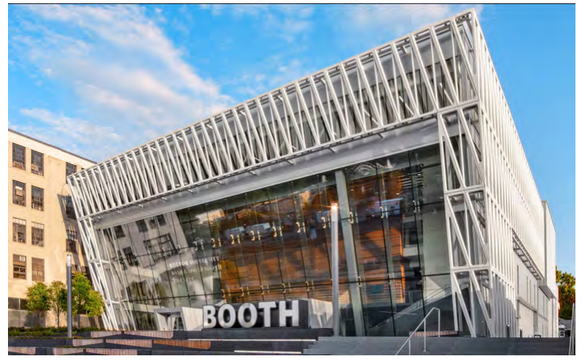


03

2019 BOSTON, MA

BOOTH ARTS PLAZA - BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Elkus Manfredi Architects, Mikyoung Kim Design



Booth Arts Plaza (Mikyoung Kim Design, 2019) reimagines an inaccessible, sloped site at Boston University into a warm, performative landscape that feels both academic and communal. The design uses linear paving lights embedded within the ground to subtly guide movement, paired with focused theatrical lighting on benches that frame moments of gathering and reflection. The space functions as both a daily passage and an outdoor performance venue, inviting interaction across disciplines. I chose this precedent because it shows how light can choreograph social connection. For the Prairie Line Trail, linear strip lights could provide low-glare, continuous wayfinding while spotlighting seating and charging zones, transforming them into intentional, safe, and welcoming nodes for evening use.

Mikyoung Kim Design (2020). Booth Arts Plaza 2016–2019. https://myk-d.com/projects/booth-theatre-boston-university/

Aerial View of Night Time

Students on Amphitheater Seating

Visibility/ Transparency

Daytime Social Interaction Nook

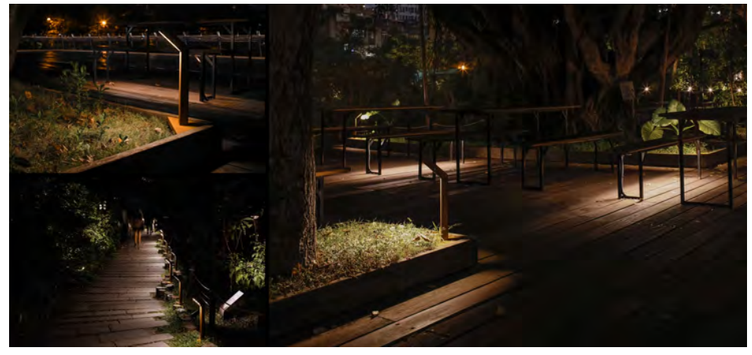
Credit: Mikyoung Kim Desiign

04

2023 TAIPEI, TAIWAN

PATH OF SERENE LIGHT

Ching Yu Lin, CosmoC Lighting, Ltd.



This 435-meter lighting intervention redefines nighttime accessibility as an ecological experience. By replacing harsh streetlights with low-temperature amber LEDs (<2700 K) and shielded bollards, the design preserves wildlife behavior while guiding pedestrians safely through the garden. Light intensity gradually diminishes toward the core, allowing human and natural rhythms to coexist. I chose this case because it demonstrates restraint as design intelligence, and the huge potential to utilize lighting as a built infrastructure to guide people and create a sense of place. For the PLT, subtle and humane lighting can promote safety for commuter students who travel early or late, while sustaining atmosphere and ecological sensitivity, making the trail both functional and emotionally restorative at all time.

CosmoC Lighting, Ltd. (n.d.). Path of serene light. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://www.cosmoc-lit.com/pathofserenelight

Amber Path Illumination

Bird-eye View of Light Placement

Bollard Fixture Design

Perimeter Lighting and Safety

Credit: CosmoC Lighting

05

2019 ROOSEVELT ISLAND, NEW YORK

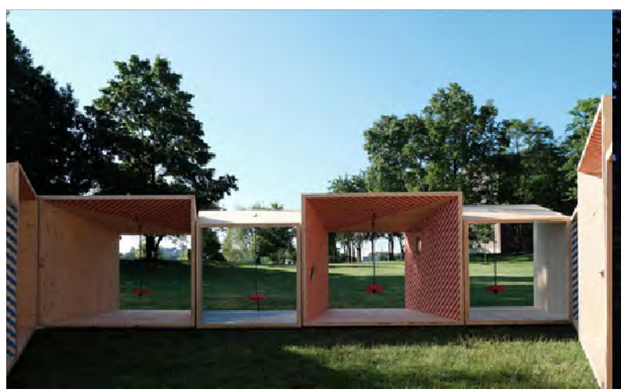
SALVAGE SWINGS

Somewhere Studio (Jessica Colangelo & Charles Sharpless)

Salvage Swings transforms reclaimed cross-laminated timber from university construction pallets into twelve modular swing units arranged in a triangular pavilion on Roosevelt Island. Each module frames an individual swing but also contributes to a larger communal gathering space, inviting play, conversation, and rest. The finger-jointed modules are flat-packable and repurposed after the installation, exemplifying sustainability and adaptability. I selected this case because its micro-design, modular swing units, open frameworks, integrated lighting and reused materials, it demonstrates how a linear corridor like the Prairie Line Trail (PLT) can deploy interactive infrastructure that encourages pause, social connection, and low-cost activation. For first-generation commuter students, such a node along the trail offers a visible, engaging zone that breaks the “path only” mindset, making the trail not just transit but a moment of belonging and rest.

Somewhere Studio. (n.d.). Salvage Swings. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://somewherestudio.com/Salvage-Swings somewherestudio.com

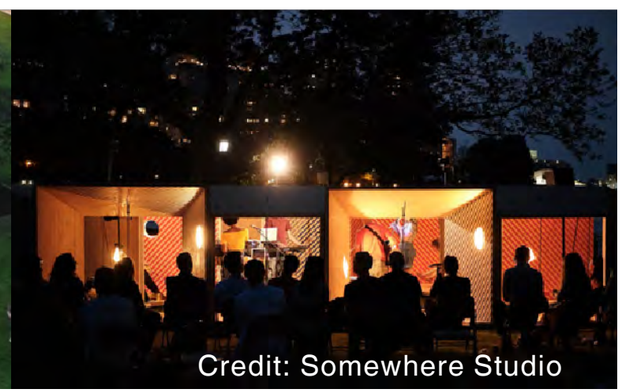
Overhead Shelter (Day)



Overhead Shelter (Night)

Multi-purpose Hub (Day)

Multi-purpose Hub (Night)



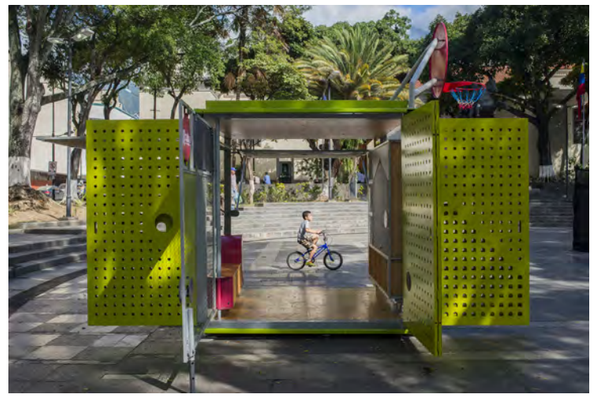
Credit: Somewhere Studio

06

2019 VENEZUELA

REFRAMING SPACES – THE CATALYST CUBE

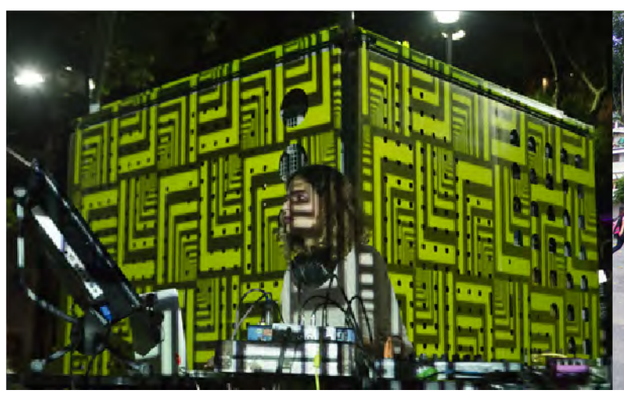
Will Sandy Design Studio + INCURSIONES



The Catalyst Cube is a portable, modular structure designed to intervene in under utilized public space in Caracas, Venezuela, offering a flexible platform for cultural, educational, and social activities. Its compact cube-form (2.4 m × 2.4 m × 2.4 m) uses steel and wood components that can be installed quickly and re-deployed. FX Design+1 It evokes a sense of ownership by local communities, converting “in-between” or overlooked urban zones into meaningful gathering points. I selected this precedent for the Prairie Line Trail redesign because it demonstrates how small-scale, visible infrastructure can cultivate belonging and activation in linear corridors. The Cube’s simplicity (mobile, human-scaled, and interactive) embodies the potential of light infrastructure to generate ownership. For the Prairie Line Trail, this concept suggests modular “activation cubes” where students can rest, study, or host pop-ups, making the linear path a lived and shared space of belonging.

Building Centre. (2020). Reframing Spaces – The Catalyst Cube in Caracas. Retrieved from https://www.archdaily.com/office/will-sandy-design-studio

Closed Modular Cube



Open Modular Cube

Kiosk/Outreach Interaction

Interior Information Display

Credit: Will Sandy Design Studio

07 2018 UAE, DUBAI

WAYFINDING MASTERPLAN

Endpoint, Dubai

The Dubai Design District (d3) is a purpose-built creative hub in the UAE whose user experience spans mixed-use buildings, public plazas, and large event zones. Endpoint's wayfinding masterplan operates across the full user journey, from pre-arrival, to the welcome experience, to exploration and exit. Micro-design moves include a bold zoning system (colour-coding parking basements to above-grade exits), supersized typography embedded in the landscape to highlight entrances, and large landmark placemaking interventions that double as navigational anchors and photo-ops. I selected this precedent because the design clearly addresses low-visibility signage and wayfinding in sprawling complex sites. For the Prairie Line Trail at University of Washington Tacoma, similar strategies, colour-zoned segments, distinctive gateway markers, and oversized typographic landmarks, which can reduce anxiety for first-generation commuter students, making the Trail legible, visible and inviting as a "third place" on campus.

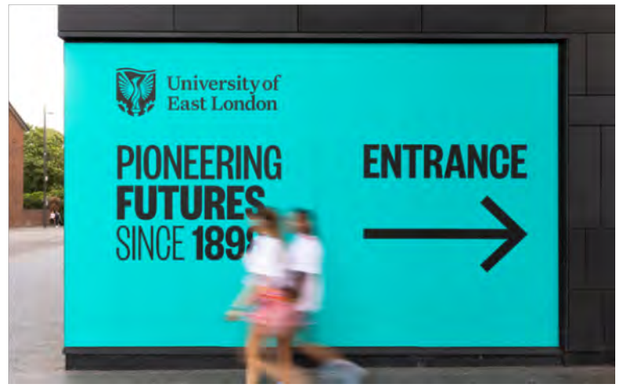
Endpoint. (2018). Dubai Design District – Award winning wayfinding masterplan. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://www.weareendpoint.com/work/dubai-design-district-award-winning-wayfinding-masterplan

Directional Totems and Signage | Detailed Pedestrian Guides | Branded Transit Shelter | Illuminated Signage

08 2018 LONDON, UK

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON- PLACEMAKING & WAYFINDING

Endpoint, England



The University of East London's placemaking and wayfinding overhaul, led by Endpoint starting in 2018, addressed multi-campus confusion by integrating brand, signage, and spatial experience into a unified system. Their approach began with an audit: users rated existing navigation 2.8 out of 5, yet rated wayfinding importance as 4.1. From that baseline they developed bold totems, three-dimensional typography, and hybrid digital-static kiosks, alongside tiered seating, environmental graphics, and flexible outdoor furniture in public spaces. I selected this project because it demonstrates how deeply wayfinding intersects with belonging: for first-generation commuter students, clarity of path and visible orientation reduces the stress of the hidden curriculum. The design offers a micro-level model for the Prairie Line Trail: branded gateways, digital "You Are Here" nodes, and clear directional signage to buildings, study and support hubs can transform the trail into an accessible campus spine.

Endpoint. (n.d.). University of East London – Placemaking masterplan, wayfinding strategy & design. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://www.weareendpoint.com/work/university-of-east-london-placemaking-masterplan-wayfinding-strategy-design

Multi-purpose Installment

Credit: Endpoint

Oversized Typographic Landmark

Eye Catching Wayfinding Kiosks

Bold Campus Identity

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN SITE PLAN

conceptual plans + core internventions

CENTRAL CAMPUS SPINE / SKY BRIDGE

WHY THE CENTRAL CAMPUS SPINE WITH SKY BRIDGE?

The central campus spine, anchored by the skybridge, represents the symbolic heart of UWT's circulation network, yet it currently lacks strong orientation cues and identity markers. This is the place where wayfinding, lighting, and signage interventions can have the highest impact for first-generation students who struggle with navigation and visibility of campus resources. The skybridge acts as a natural landmark and vertical connector, making it an ideal anchor for illuminated signs, branded trail markers, and resource kiosks that guide students with clarity and confidence. Strengthening this spine not only improves legibility—it reinforces belonging by making the PLT feel like a cohesive, student-centered gateway into campus life.

17ST STREET CORRIDOR

WHY 17th STREET COORIDOR?

I chose the 17th Street Corridor because it is the PLT's most natural pause point, which is a quieter, mid-trail zone where movement slows and students are not rushing to parking or class. This makes it the ideal location for Activation Cubes and small-scale interventions that encourage lingering, studying, and gathering. The corridor's softer lighting, reduced traffic noise, and proximity to academic buildings create a unique opportunity to introduce flexible, modular structures that can host pop-ups, peer support tables, and commuter-friendly study niches. In other words, 17th Street is where the PLT can shift from circulation to community—where a path begins to feel like a place.

17 TH STREET CONCEPTUAL PLAN

a-a’ conceptual plans + core internventions

BOLD CAMPUS IDENTITY

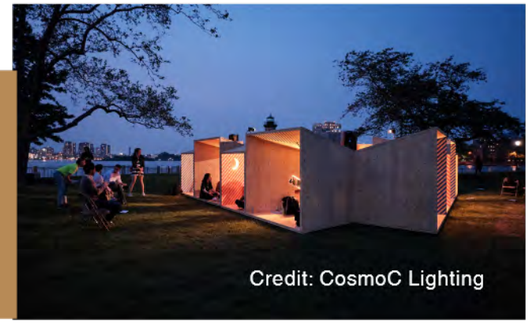
Having distinctive gateway markers and building watermarks can reduce anxiety for first-generation commuter students, making the Trail legible, visible and inviting as a “third place” on campus.

OVERSIZED LANDMARK

The design offers a micro-level model for the Prairie Line Trail: branded gateways, digital “You Are Here” nodes, and clear directional signagе to buildings, study and support hubs can transform the trail into an accessible campus spine.

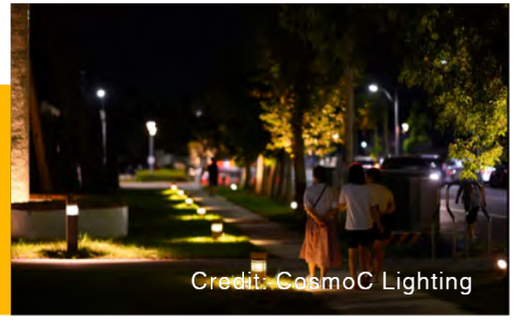
MULTI-PURPOSE HUB

I selected this case because its micro-design, modular swing units, open frameworks, integrated lighting and reused materials, it demonstrates how a linear corridor like the PLT can deploy interactive infrastructure that encourages pause, social connection



PATH ILLUMINATION

Subtle and humane lighting can promote safety for commuter students who travel early or late, while sustaining atmosphere and ecological sensitivity, making the trail both functional and emotionally restorative at all time.



Render a-a’ for 17th Street Entrance

CENTRAL CAMPUS SPINE CONCEPTUAL PLAN

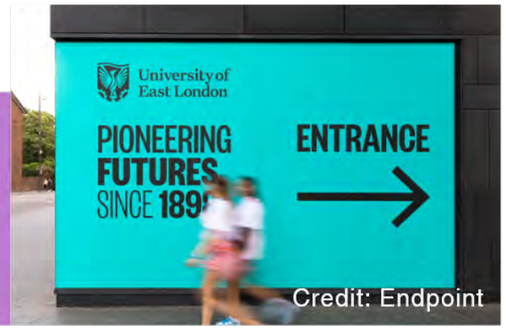
b-b’conceptual plans + core internventions

ILLUMINATED SIGNAGES

Illuminated kiosks and signages act as visible anchors along the trail, guiding first-generation and commuter students toward key resources while strengthening safety, clarity, and campus identity after dark.”

CAMPUS IDENTITY MARKER

Having distinctive gateway markers and building watermarks can reduce anxiety for first-generation commuter students, making the Trail legible, visible and inviting as a “third place” on campus.



INTERACTIVE ART

I’m using this precedent because it utilizes public art and turns a simple route into a place of care, belonging, and daily nourishmen, along with a glimpse of joy when it comes to foraging.

MULTI-PURPOSE HUB

I selected this precedent for the Prairie Line Trail redesign because it demonstrates how small-scale, visible infrastructure can cultivate belonging and activation in linear corridors.

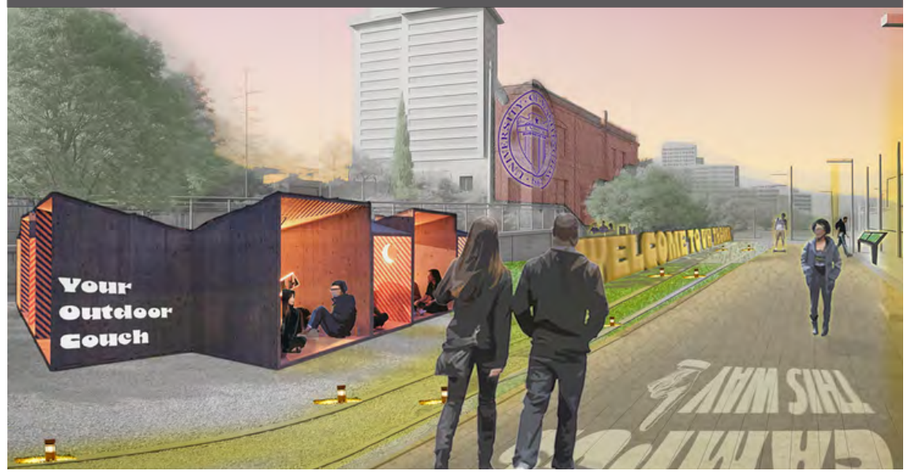
Render b-b’ for Central Campus Spine Rendering

CONCEPTUAL DESIGN RENDERING

Before and After Comparison

BEFORE
The 17th Street corridor functioned only as a quiet pass-through, with an empty stretch of pavement where students simply walked by, offering no shelter, no seating, and no reason to pause.

AFTER
The corridor becomes a micro-campus living room, activated by modular “outdoor couch” structures, warm ground lighting, and subtle identity graphics. What was once a transitional void now invites commuters to sit, rest, study, and gather. Turning movement into meaningful pause.



BEFORE
The central spine beneath the skybridge lacked visibility and legibility. It was a dim, windswept connector with no clear wayfinding, no destination, and little sense of arrival for first-gen students navigating campus.

AFTER
The spine transforms into a bright, welcoming gateway marked by illuminated signage, improved lighting, and weather-ready rest zones. The skybridge becomes a visual landmark, guiding students toward resources and gathering spaces. Shifting the PLT from a confusing passage into a recognizable campus identity anchor.