

DLR Group inc. a Nebraska corporation 1128 Lincoln Mall Ste. 103 Lincoln, NE 68508

July 24th, 2023

AIA Nebraska 335 N. 8th Street, Suite A Lincoln, NE 68508

Re: AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural/Design Education - Nomination Letter

Dear AIA Nebraska Jury Members:

I would like you to consider my nomination for a leader in our region and nationally Vanessa Schutte for the distinguished AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural/Design Education.

Vanessa's leadership in the field of architecture and education extends beyond the walls of DLR Group. Illustrated through her leadership in organizations such as The Association for Learning Environments (A4LE), speaking on the local and national stage as well as teaching at The University of Nebraska College of Architecture her dedication for teaching and learning shines through. Vanessa is one of only a few Accredited Learning Environment Planners (ALEP) in our region. A lifelong learner she is committed to continually growing in her own profession and elevating those around her by example.

Vanessa's passion to elevate what is possible in educational design creates new and exciting opportunities in every project. She is always looking for ways to engage students in the design process. This ensures everyone's voice is heard but more importantly students have ownership in their communities. Many of these engagements manifest in physical expressions of the final architecture. The exposure to architecture, interior design, engineering, art, graphic design, as well as construction has without question led to creating growth in the profession. DLR Group has directly benefited from these relationships, having many past students currently working in our studios.

Vanessa's passion for education is an extension of her family of educators. She expresses her passion differently though her approach is similar, selfless acts to help others discover their passions. I believe she embodies what this award was intended to recognize and it's my pleasure to get to learn from her every day.

Sincerely,

Darin Hanigan, AIA, NCARB Senior Associate | Architect

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## Vanessa Schutte, AIA, ALEP

Principal | Architect



Architecture and education have been intertwined in Vanessa's life since she was about eight years old. As the daughter of two teachers, her childhood was full of creative activities and learning opportunities. One particular memory is of her father, who was a high school art instructor, remodeling the family summer cabin. He made a point to engage her in the design process by asking her to help create the pattern for the new kitchen floor, and the rest is history. Many projects and many years later, Vanessa is an architect specializing in the design of K-12 education facilities.

Before joining DLR Group in 2015, Vanessa earned a Bachelor of Design degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a certificate in historic preservation, and a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Maryland College Park. The diverse midwestern and east coast demographics taught her how to collaborate with team members and clients of all backgrounds and perspectives and inspired her belief that integrated design is the synergy of all stakeholders throughout each phase of design.

Vanessa has spent her entire professional career as a respected employee-owner at DLR Group. She became the K-12 central region leader in 2015 and earned distinction of principal in 2016. As a K-12 leader, Vanessa provides strategic, visionary, and positive leadership to the studio, which has completed dozens educational design projects in the past five years. She also has a passion for engaging students from the districts she is working with in the design and creation of their future schools.

Vanessa has been a lecturer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Architecture since 2015. She hosted a collaborative studio in education design for fourth year interior design and architecture students. The course was structured to allow students to explore and develop theories of NextGeneration Learning and the spaces that best support those ideas.

Outside of the collaborative K-12 studio, Vanessa enjoys watching her three sons, Jonas, Creighton, and Norman, grow and learn through creative play. She loves spending her weekends outside, whether it be on the lake, by the fire, or in the vegetable garden with her husband, PJ.







## **Statement of Contributions**

**American Institute of Architects** 

- · 2021-22 AIA Nebraska Education Committee Member
- · 2022 AIA Nebraska Past President Education Committee Chair
- · 2019 AIA Nebraska President Education Committee Chair
- · 2018 AIA Nebraska Secretary
- · 2017 AIA Nebraska Treasurer
- · 2013-16 AIA Nebraska Board of Directors
- · 2012 State AIA Fall Conference Committee
- 2011 Committee to redefine categories and requirements for AIA Nebraska's Excellence in Design Awards
- 2011-Present Mentor to architecture students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- · 2009-Present Active AIA Member

**Student Engagement Projects** 

- · 2012 Westside High School Brick Mural
- · 2015 Oakdale Elementary School Media Center Desk
- · 2020 Gretna East High School Precast Panel Design
- · 2021 Douglas High School Precast Panel Design
- · 2022 Boys Town High School Tile Design

University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Architecture

- · 2014 Guest Critic
- · 2015-19, 2021-Present Lecturer, Fall Semesters
- · 2018 Strategic Planning Committee Member
- · 2016-Present Professional Advisory Committee Member
- 2022- Present College of Architecture PAC Outreach and Impact Committee Chair

Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)

- 2017 Founding Member of Nebraska and Western Iowa A4LE Local Chapter
- · 2017-Present Nebraska and Western Iowa Board Member
- · 2018 Accredited Learning Environment Professional

Community Involvement & Volunteering

- · 2005-Present Boys Scouts of America Explorers Program
- · 2006-07 Society of Military Engineers Mentor Program
- 2008-09 University of Nebraska-Omaha Peter Kiewit Institute Architectural Mentor
- · 2009 Saint Patrick's Catholic Church Fair Stand
- · 2010 Take a Seat
- 2011-13 University of Nebraska-Omaha Peter Kiewit Institute Industry Mentor
- · 2012 All About Omaha Torchlight Ball
- · 2013 Kaneko Girls & Architecture Design Summer Camp
- · 2014-18 Westside Community Schools Youth Career Connect
- · 2015-16 Westside Community Schools STEM Program

Vanessa lives and breathes educational design whether she is at work, in the classroom, at home, or serving her community.







# Awards, Recognitions and Jury Service

#### 2023

PAC Prize Juror, Univeristy of Nebraska College of Architecture

LearningSCAPES 2023 Content Committee, Association for Learning Environments

PCI Design Awards Building Juror, Precast / Prestressed Conscrete Institute

Jefferson High School Association for Learning Environments Midwest Great Lakes John Shaw Award Honorable Mention

#### 2022

Pinnacle Award Juror Association for Learning Environments

PCI Design Awards Building Juror, Precast / Prestressed Concrete Institute

#### 2021

Pinnacle Award Juror Association for Learning Environments

#### 2019

Council for Interior Design Accreditation for Excellence Learning Spaces Collaboration Studio

#### 2018

AIA Nebraska Excellence in Masonry | Merit — AIA Nebraska Adams Central Elementary School; Hastings, NE

#### 2015

American Concrete Institute Award of Excellence Holdrege Elementary School; Holdrege, NE

### 2014

Associated Builders & Contractors Cornhusker Chapter Excellence in Construction Award

Oakland-Craig Elementary School Addition & Renovation; Oakland, NE

Nebraska AIA Art by Architects Award Photography

#### 2013

Brick in Architecture Juror

Brick Industry Association

#### 2012

 $\label{lem:continuous} \textit{The Brick Industry Association} - \textit{Silver, Brick in Architecture Award} \\ \textit{Westside High School Performing Arts Addition}$ 

Associated Builders & Contractors Cornhusker Chapter Excellence in Construction Award

Westside High School Performing Arts Addition

# Speaking Engagements, Panels, & Written Works

#### 2023

Speaker, "Classroom Design: The Architect and Teachers Perspective,"

184th Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in Chicago Speaker, "Clasroom Design: The Architect and Teachers Perspective,"

Durham School of Architectural Engineering and Construction High School Teachers Workshop

Speaker, "Boys Town Education Center: The Evolution of Learning Environments that Serve All Students."

Assocition for Learning Environment Midwest Great Lakes Regional Conference

#### 2022

Speaker, "Boys Town Education Center: The Evolution of Learning Environments that Serve All Students"

Association for Learning Environments (A4LE) — Midwest Great Lakes Regional Conference

Speaker, "Involving Students in the Design & Construction Process" Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute Convention

#### 2019

Speaker, "Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium Robert B. Daugherty Education Center" SXSQ Edu

Speaker, "A Giraffe Ate My Homework" Association for Learning Environments LEARNINGscapes

Speaker, "Engaging Students in the Design Process" Association for Learning Environments (A4LE) — Midwest Great Lakes Regional Conference

#### 2018

Speaker, "Hands Off My Play-Doh! The Importance of Space & Furniture" edSPACES

#### 2017

Speaker, "Hands Off My Play-Doh! The Importance of Space & Furniture" NeoCon Annual Conference

#### 2015

Moderator, "Designing Schools for the Future: A Design & Education Roundtable"

University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Architecture

Author, "Ed Specs Can Elevate Teaching & Learning" www.dlrgroup.com

#### 2014

Author, "Engaging Students in the Design Process Can Have Lifelong Impacts"

www.dlrgroup.com

#### 2013

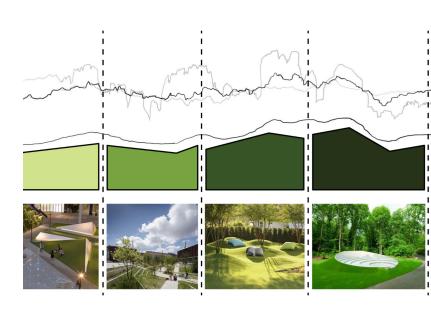
Invited Juror, 2013 Brick in Architecture Award The Brick Industry Association

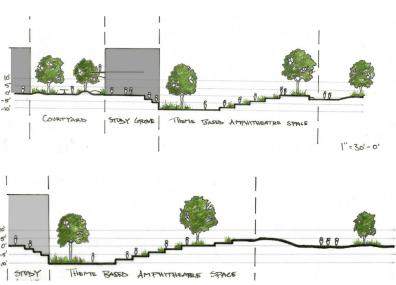
Invited Speaker, Peter Kiewit Institute Professional Practice University of Nebraska-Omaha

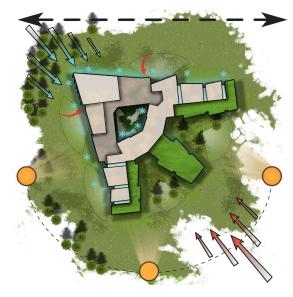
# University of Nebraska Lincoln Learning Spaces

LINCOLN, Neb.

The 2022 Learning Spaces Studio was about handling growth and equity. Studnets were given the task to design a master plan that includes a new elementary, middle, and high school to support the influx of students from the nearby Air Force Base. This was a design focused studio that helped students with their research, programming, collaboration, and social engagement.













**Engaging students in the design process can have lifelong impacts** 

Written and published by Vanessa Schutte, 2015

I firmly believe that involving students in the design process ignites learning that can shape their careers, and maybe even inspire a future architect or engineer.

It all began when I was about eight years old. My dad, a high school art instructor, was remodeling our summer cabin and I was having fun watching the progress as I chased frogs and launched myself off the diving board into the murky lake. However, my interest in the remodel project changed dramatically when my father involved me in the design process. He asked me to design the pattern for the new kitchen floor.

Together, we went to the brick supplier and my small hands sorted through bricks of all sizes and colors as we discussed the opportunities of each. We found the perfect one, calculated how many we needed and I lugged several hundred of them over to the truck. On the drive back, my mind began churning out ideas for arranging the bricks on the floor. Oblivious at the time, it was on that kitchen floor - with my dirty small hands sliding those bricks into all kinds of patterns - that my mind began to make the connection of how art is infused in architecture.

Many projects and many years later, I am an architect specializing in the design of K-12 education facilities. I firmly believe that involving students in the building design process ignites learning that can shape their future. When school districts have the opportunity to build or renovate, there are several possibilities to engage students and let them directly impact or experience the design of one of the most important buildings in their community.

The Performing Arts Addition at Westside High School in Omaha, Neb., is a perfect case study. Faced with

the constraints of a very tight site and functional relationships, the design team had to resolve the issue of having a mechanical room adjacent to the main entrance. DLR Group presented this challenge to the owner and stakeholders as an opportunity for student involvement. We proposed the idea that students could design and sculpt a brick mural on the wall that covers the mechanical equipment to integrate visual arts in the performing arts addition.

The process started with conversations between DLR Group's design team and interested current and former students. We discussed in detail the performing arts addition and together we created a vision for the brick mural. The art department held a design competition and shortlisted the designs to two. The final design was chosen by District administration.

Next the art department employed an essay and interview process to select a team of brick carvers. These students and instructors spent their open periods and time after school stacking, carving, and disassembling the wet bricks over a course of several weeks. This exercise was the foundation for a semester full of lessons about brick making and brick sculpting for all art students, not just the team of brick carvers.

The brick mural won a Brick in Architecture Silver Award from the Brick Industry Association and gained media attention for the District. Sure, including students in the process takes trust and dedication between the District, teachers, students and designers, but the value can last a lifetime and may inspire a future architect or engineer.

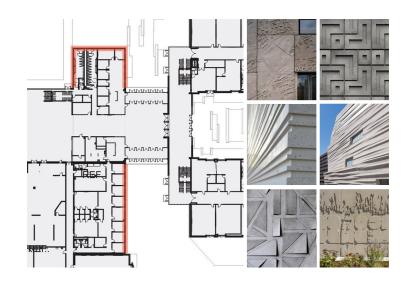
"Sure, including students in the process takes trust and dedication between the District, teachers, students and designers, but the value can last a lifetime and may inspire a future architect or engineer."



## **Engaging Students in the Design Process: Gretna East High School**

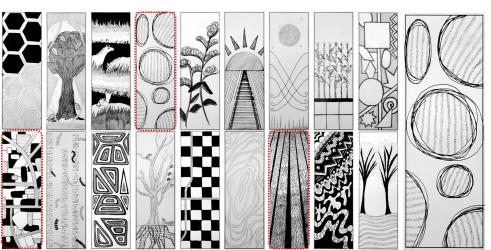
Gretna, Neb.

DLR Group is currently partnered with Gretna Public Schools on the design and construction of a second new high school, called Gretna East High School. Vanessa led efforts to engage students in the design process. The group, consisting of art students from Gretna High School, designed their own precast panels for the exterior of the new facility. They then voted on their favorites in the class. The winning designs were integrated into the exterior, as seen in the images depicted below.











Scan here to see a video about the student engagement process!



July 21, 2023

AIA Nebraska 335 N. 8th Street, Ste. A Lincoln, NE 68508

RE: Nomination of Vanessa Schutte for the AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural | Design Education

Dear AIA Nebraska Jury Members,

It is my honor and great pleasure to offer my recommendation of Vanessa Schutte, AIA, ALEP for the distinguished AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural | Design Education.

Since 2015, Vanessa has served not only as an educator at UNL, but as a leader in an innovative studio experience, the Learning Spaces Studio. Learning Spaces Studio is one of the 4th-year "Collaborate" studios, where students from architecture, interior design, and landscape architecture preference choices of topics and educator teams and is predicated on offering complex topics requiring the voice and integration of more than one profession. Vanessa's leadership of and partnership in this studio and contributions to the studio team of professional and multidisciplinary educators is nothing short of astounding.

As the College of Architecture Dean, I led an inclusive strategic planning process for the college, one that would take us forward and embody our aspirations long into the future. As a part of that endeavor, I invited key members of the professional community to invest their time, perspective, vision, and wisdom with us throughout the process. Vanessa didn't hesitate to say yes to my invitation and made valuable contributions well beyond my hopes.

During my tenure as Dean, Vanessa served on the College of Architecture Professional Advisory Council for many years, as a representative of AIA Nebraska, and as a valued member. Her presence and voice demonstrated insight, reason, and always with a future focus on how we were shaping our contribution to the greater good.

I am continually impressed, in every interaction and circumstance, with how Vanessa lives the ideals this award acknowledges. Her care for students is palpable – she is mentor, educator, professional architect, leader, collaborator – and she is genuine. She demonstrates first-hand the collaborative spirit required to make a project successful, what it means to be a professional firm's leader, and the generosity of spirit and knowledge that contributes so significantly to how students view their future professional lives. Her collaboration with fellow educators demonstrates respectful collaboration. Her authentic relationships with clients become a living example for students; her connection to the people affected by projects long after they are occupied show students that what they do matters in transforming environments that truly affect peoples' lives.

Vanessa meets the award criteria, having demonstrated esteemed character and rendered distinguished service to the profession of architecture design or to the arts science in a Nebraska institution of higher learning. Vanessa truly epitomizes the positive connection of architecture and education, the integral symbiosis of practice and education, unselfish leadership with integrity and professionalism, and I cannot recommend her strongly enough for this honor.

Sincerely,

Katherine S Ankerson

Kathering S. autersox

2022 AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural | Design Education recipient



Kathleen O'Gara Graduate Student at University of Nebraska – Lincoln 105 Hanksway St, South Sioux City, NE (712)389-6788 ogarakathy@gmail.com

July 24, 2023

Vanessa Schutte Studio Instructor / Lecturer University of Nebraska – Lincoln vschutte@dlrgroup.com

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to enthusiastically recommend Vanessa Schutte for the AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural/Design Education.

My name is Kathleen O'Gara, a Master of Architecture Student at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. I had the pleasure of having Vanessa as a studio instructor at UNL in the fall of 2021.

Vanessa is by far one of the best instructors I have had at UNL. Her studio was not only successful because she encouraged high quality work and thoughtful design, but also because of the extensive amount of real-world knowledge she shared with our class. Our studio project was a career and technical education center at Boys Town. It is clear that Vanessa is passionate about education and education design. Her passion inspired my classmates and I as she constantly challenged us to consider the needs of the students and teachers who would be directly affects by the spaces we design.

Because Vanessa is also a practicing architect, she helped our projects achieve a high level of realness and resolution by making us think critically about structure and codes, which only elevated the designs. Going into my final studio of undergrad in the spring, I felt I was a step ahead of my classmates who had taken other studios in the fall.

Vanessa has made lasting impact on my architectural education and professional experience. She is approachable, knowledgeable, and passionate. She uses her talents and skills to help those around her. I highly recommend Vanessa for the AIA Nebraska Award for Architectural/Design Education.

Sincerely,

Kathleen O'Gara

Master of Architecture Student at University of Nebraska – Lincoln





July 24, 2023

Dear AIA Review Committee,

I write this letter to nominate **Vanessa Schutte**, DLR Group Principal and Lead Architect in K-12 Education Central Region Leader, for the AIA Nebraska Architecture Design Educator Honor Award. Vanessa has been an integral leader and partner in the instruction of one of the College of Architecture's signature interdisciplinary studios (DSGN 410-Collabrate Studio). In the last five years, Vanessa and DLRGroup, have been long-time partners and supporters of a particular DSGN 410 offering titled, "**The Learning Spaces Collaborate Studio.**" This studio positions Vanessa's elite level of educational design knowledge to provide a unique platform for creative problem solving with multi-disciplinary student teams. Since the Fall of 2017, there has been 5 studios offered and co-taught by Vanessa and over 100 College of Architecture students who have benefited from her involvement and depth of knowledge in the design of learning environments that support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.

"The Learning Spaces Collaborate Studio" has been a successful and sustained example of an effective partnership between industry, academic, and community stakeholders. The studio has most often been co-taught by Vanessa Schutte and College of Architecture Associate Interior Design Professor, Nate Bicak. Throughout the years, various other design professionals and UNL academics have been involved in the studio framework and student learning experiences. Each studio has relied on meaningful relationships with community stakeholders and have strategically positioned design problems that have challenged the standards of education design and integrated design research to inform design decisions.

Vanessa's time spent in co-developing, co-teaching, and co-leading the last five years of the College of Architecture's DSGN 410 - "The Learning Spaces Collaborate Studio" has resulted in three categories of exceptional outcomes:

**Category 1:** Student Learning Outcomes are more Comprehensive and Data-driven.

The work that is achieved through collaborative student groups and the leadership of Vanessa and her teaching partner have consistently demonstrated the power of disciplinary overlaps. Each year student proposals present more fully integrated and comprehensive spatial solutions than if the students were to design a school as an individual student, or with only one disciplinary perspective. This is a direct result of Vanessa and Nate's ability to lead by example (one an architect, the other an interior design academic), but also in part due to Vanessa's own experience of leading interdisciplinary teams at DLR Group. Positioning her strategies in teambased mindsets to complex problem solving into the classroom.



**COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE** 

The projects developed in the studio push the boundaries of standardized learning spaces and have resulted in new innovative spatial typologies that respond to the latest design research, trends in education, and theories in learning and pedagogy. Again, this is because of the teaching team's ability to position and share the wealth of knowledge Vanessa has due to her extensive practice and leadership in educational design. Vanessa has successfully found ways to translate the latest research on the built environment and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to students in the design studio. This has empowered students with the opportunity to be innovative in their design development through data-driven design decisions. The results have been strong design proposals that challenge assumptions and inspire learning; while also addressing learning styles, safety, efficiency, and economic issues that impact the design of schools.

### **Category 2:** Productive Bridging of Academia & Industry Design Processes.

Nate and Vanessa have relied on one another's areas of expertise to jump start highly effective learning in the studio for students. Nate has established instruments to form student teams that are based on skill assessment and student learning styles; Vanessa makes current research in education accessible and understandable and shares tools for effective programmatic development in learning environments based on enrollment and high-impact teaching strategies. The DSGN 410 Collaborate Studio provides a platform for creative problem solving in an academic environment; but is anchored by analytical and practical knowledge established by industry experts.

The student outcomes developed in the studio then serve as a "spring board" to design professionals in DLR Group and prompt discussions about "what could be" in the design of schools for the future. This has developed a feedback loop of practice inspired by academia, and academia informed by practice.

In addition, in 2017 the studio received national recognition as Honorable Mention for the prestigious Council for Interior Design Accreditations (CIDA) Award for Excellence. This award recognizes outstanding practices that advance the cause of excellence in interior design education. "The Learning Spaces Collaborate Studio" was selected for honorable mention based on the studios approach in establishing a studio that had intentional, productive, and impactful overlaps with professional practice to benefit student learning.





**Category 3:** Community Engagement Outcomes.

As a teaching partner, Vanessa has been critical in bringing in real community partners to the "The Learning Spaces Collaborative Studio". These partners, and Vanessa and Nate's ability to weave the partners involvement in the design studio throughout the semester, have given students a distinct experience in community engagement and the opportunity to navigate how project stakeholders influence the design process. Public school super-intendents, principals, teachers, staff, students, and community citizens have served as integral sources for design students to: (1) understand specific needs for communities, (2) understand essential and optimal teaching and learning experiences, practices, and conditions from the point of view of teachers and students in K-12 environments, and (3) learn research and data-collection methods in interviewing, surveys, and observation to better inform the design process. Vanessa's connections and ability to position local and regional communities at the center of the studio has resulted in intentional, thoughtful and contextual design solutions.

In closing, Nate's dedication to establishing a teaching framework for this interdisciplinary, collaborative learning studio; and Vanessa's expertise and knowledge in the design of schools, and research in education; has resulted in a signature learning experience for design students in the College of Architecture at UNL. The studio has proven to be a challenging and fun learning environment that holds College of Architecture design students accountable in their communication and understanding across disciplinary boundaries. It has resulted in over 25 design proposals that were led with the intention to have positive impact on the learning environments for future generations of children and educators in our local communities. Finally, it has opened the door for student interest and investment in Education Design, a typology that has continuously (and even more so recently) proven to have significant impact on the health, wellness, success, and future of our societal and social systems. For five years, Vanessa has made a significant contribution to the College of Architecture and has had immeasurable amounts of positive impact on architecture and design students through their educational experiences in **DSGN 410 "The Learning Spaces Collaborate Studio"**. I hope that you agree in my assessment of her excellence and commitment to design education in Nebraska.

Best,

**Lindsey Bahe** 

Interior Design Program Director, Associate Professor BSD-Architecture. M.Architecture.



#### **COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE**



Student Work Samples - Research, Precedent, and Site Analysis Phases, 2016