

The first Honors Think Tank convened at Ensign Peak in the fall of 2004 to explore and assess the nature of downtown America, and Salt Lake's downtown in particular. This group of 14 Honors students and two faculty advisors selected a two-block area located between 500 and 600 West and 200 and 300 South as the focus of their community-based research.

The students created subcommittees to become experts in history, diversity, housing and business issues. They created a brief documentary film capturing personal interviews with residents of the area. They created relationships with relevant downtown agencies including the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, Envision Utah, the Downtown Alliance, the Salt Lake City Mayor's Office, the RDA, and the LDS Church. The team received expert advice and varying perspectives on the problems facing Salt Lake City from these public partners.

After two semesters of careful research, the Think Tank team was well prepared to share their findings with the community. They participated in an open house and

community forum at the new Intermodal Hub, where they presented their research beside experts in the field from Salt Lake City and UTA. The team also made presentations at the Vibrant Downtown Conference, sponsored by Utah's Urban Land Institute, and at the Undergraduate Research Symposium at the U of U. Several local media outlets published stories that praised their work. A book detailing their work was published.

Faculty mentor Keith Bartholomew, Assistant Professor in the College of Architecture + Planning, says that in addition to learning about urban planning and creating a vibrant downtown, the group also learned about doing research in the context of a small learning community.

"One of our objectives all along has been for the student members of our group to leave the relative safety and security of typical academe and wrestle with problems, formulate questions, and take leadership roles in developing ways of answering some of those questions," he said. "These students have succeeded in that task, well beyond our wildest dreams."



"Unlike typical reports focused on Main Street and its perceived demise, students wisely bypassed the LDS Church's downtown domain in favor of an oft-overlooked community where homeless residents, tattoo artists and concert-goers intersect."

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