

# Society for College and University Planning SCUP Fellow Research Project Final Report

## Institutional Decisions of How to Carry On After a Campus Tragedy

An Examination of Campus-Based Memorial  
Structures and Commemorative Spaces

Mahauganee D. Shaw Bonds, Ph.D.  
SCUP Fellow 2017–2018



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#### ABOUT THE SOCIETY FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PLANNING (SCUP)

At SCUP, we believe that by uniting higher education leaders, we can meet the rapid pace of change and competition, advancing each institution as it shapes and defines its future. Through connection, learning, and expanded conversation, we help create integrated planning solutions that will unleash the promise and potential of higher education.

Our community includes colleges and universities (two-year, four-year, liberal arts, doctoral-granting research institutions, public, private, for-profit, and private sector). Individuals we serve include planning leaders with institution-wide responsibilities, such as presidents, provosts, and other senior roles, to those who are in the trenches, such as chairs, directors, and managers.

#### WHAT IS INTEGRATED PLANNING?

Integrated planning is a sustainable approach to planning that builds relationships, aligns the organization, and emphasizes preparedness for change.



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### MEET MAHAUGANEE D. SHAW BONDS



#### WHAT PROMPTED YOUR CHOICE OF RESEARCH TOPIC?

The original purpose of this project was to learn more about how higher education institutions remember times of campus and community crisis through the design and construction of physical memorial structures. In today's news cycles, college campuses are often at the center of recent or developing tragedies. As the details of the latest campus tragedy—its inception, development, and impact—are digested by the general public, the campus community at the center of a tragedy is busy making sense of its “new normal” (Hemphill & Leblanc, 2010; McNamee & Diamond, 2004). Often, the first steps toward settling into the new normal for a campus community entail working through the gravity of recent events, which includes a need for internal reflection, external processing, and collective healing. Campus communities engaged in this process often find a way to memorialize the events that have shaken them and to honor the lives of any community members lost to tragedy. My research project focuses on physical memorials that are the result of a tragic moment in institutional history.

# THE PROJECT

## HOW DID YOU APPROACH AND CARRY OUT YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT?

Before applying to the SCUP Fellows program, I began developing a list of campuses with physical memorial structures that commemorate a past campus emergency. When it was time to begin this project, I selected institutions from that list, and institutions that had experienced more recent emergencies for consideration.

My project was designed to collect the stories of multiple memorial sites; I thus needed memorials that were unique enough to add a different perspective to my analysis. I shared my “wish list” of memorials with my SCUP coaches and began to discuss how the set of memorials would fit together and how I might begin to make contact with potential participants. Each of the memorials considered for this project has its own contact story. With one, I used my professional network to learn the proper contact for a particular memorial; for another, I read articles about the memorial (as it was well covered in the print media) to identify names of those involved and then reached out via their campus emails; and for others, the SCUP office and name were leveraged to help open doors with design firms that worked on the memorial. The four memorials that were ultimately included in the project are listed in Table 1.

Once contact was made, data was gathered via interviews with people who worked on the memorials (mostly architects, designers, or campus planners); news articles and other publications that documented the memorialization process as it progressed and the memorial was dedicated; and pictures of the memorial, either supplied by one of the previously mentioned data sources or taken personally.

## SITES OF STUDY

Each of the memorials included in this study is situated on a college or university campus and intended to memorialize a loss of life associated with the institution. Collectively, the four memorials studied depict a wide range of campus-based incidents and a similarly-wide range of related communities that are impacted when tragedy touches a campus. Each of the memorials involved an intensive planning process, which included collecting ideas and perspectives broadly from the campus community, local community, and friends and relatives of the deceased. While two of the memorials have been completed, two are yet in progress. Table 1 provides a brief overview of each memorial and is followed by a fuller description.

**Table 1. Institutions and memorials studied as part of this project.**

Institution	Memorialized Event	Memorial Details	Memorial Status
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sean Collier Memorial	Shooting death of campus police officer, Sean Collier	Memorial structure/artwork in high-traffic area of campus	Completed
University of Cincinnati (UC) Samuel DuBose Memorial Bench	Shooting death of local community member, Sam DuBose, by campus police officer	Memorial bench installed in quiet section of campus	Completed
University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC) Developing Memorial	Burial ground for state's first mental hospital located underneath the campus	Memorial ossuary, to possibly include a visitor's center and research lab	Senate Bill 2895 passed 3/2018 to allow relocation of bones
University of Virginia (UVA) Memorial to Enslaved Laborers	Acknowledgement of campus history with slave labor	Memorial structure designed by team of people connected to the campus	Construction began early 2019

**Sean Collier Memorial at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**

Website: <https://listart.mit.edu/public-art-map/sean-collier-memorial>

On April 18, 2013, MIT Officer Sean Collier was shot at close range, while sitting in his police cruiser. The culprits, who attempted unsuccessfully to steal Officer Collier's service weapon before fleeing the scene, were later identified as the suspects who bombed the Boston Marathon a few days earlier, on April 15. Officer Collier's death became a key event in the timeline of the Marathon bombing. Designated as part of MIT's public art collection, the memorial structure in Officer Collier's honor is sited in a high-traffic area of campus, near the site of his shooting. In addition to the campus community, it is a space where people who want to remember victims of the bombing will often visit. An early decision by the initial planning committee to have the memorial designed by a member of the MIT community led to the committee recruiting J. Meejin Yoon, faculty and chair of MIT's Department of Architecture. Yoon is also a principal of Höweler + Yoon, the architecture firm that worked on the project.

**Samuel Dubose Memorial Bench at the University of Cincinnati (UC)**

On July 19, 2015, a University of Cincinnati police officer stopped local resident Sam DuBose for a missing front license plate. What was intended as a routine traffic stop resulted in a shot fired into the car, which killed DuBose immediately on impact. Sam DuBose's name quickly became the latest name in the highly-publicized list of unarmed Black men killed by police officers. The University's settlement agreement with the family mandated the establishment of a memorial in his name. With input from both the DuBose family and the campus community, the resulting memorial is a bench located along a prominent campus walkway designed with a meandering path that offers moments of solitude and quiet in the otherwise urban campus environment. This project was completed by an internal team from the University's Planning, Design, and Construction office.

**Developing Memorial at the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UMMC)**

Website: <https://www.asylumhillproject.org/>

In 2012, while engaged in a construction project, the University of Mississippi Medical Center discovered unmarked graves on their campus. The use of underground radars and geomagnetic imaging techniques have revealed as many as 7,000 graves located beneath the campus, the final resting places of former

patients of the Mississippi Hospital for the Insane. The hospital opened in 1855 and operated on a portion of the land that is now UMMC until 1935. UMMC opened 20 years later, in 1955.

From this discovery, the Asylum Hill Research Consortium was established. The group includes an array of scholars and community members whose expertise is helping to guide the pathway forward. The Asylum Hill Project is multifaceted, and includes plans to appropriately and respectfully memorialize the deceased.

The memorialization effort has included outreach to the community of descendants related to the deceased patients. It is a difficult feat given incomplete records; a recognition of the historical significance and cultural sensitivities inherent in this discovery; and a commitment to memorialize in a manner that both commemorates and educates.

An original idea to create an ossuary has evolved into a desire to develop a space that serves as both a visitor's center and a research lab. The Asylum Hill Research Consortium is the group charged with moving this project forward.

### **Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia (UVA)**

Website: <https://www.virginia.edu/slaverymemorial/>

In 2013, the President's Commission on Slavery and the University was formed at UVA and charged to offer recommendations to the President on the commemoration of the University's history with slavery and enslaved people. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers is an outgrowth of this work, but also the result of more than a decade of student requests for the University to recognize its history with enslavement. Beginning with the construction of the Lawn in 1817 and continuing through the end of the Civil War in 1865, approximately 5,000 enslaved people from the African diaspora worked or lived on the grounds of UVA. Those people will be commemorated in the memorial structure that is currently under construction in a site that will be highly visible within the campus infrastructure as well as to vehicles driving by the campus. The memorial is slated to be completed in time for the University's bicentennial celebration in 2019. Selected through an RFP process, Höweler + Yoon is working on this project, along with a team of people connected to the campus.



## WHAT SPECIFICALLY DID YOU LEARN FROM YOUR RESEARCH THAT OTHER PLANNERS SHOULD KNOW, AND WILL BENEFIT THEM IN THEIR WORK?

After examining four recent campus-based memorialization processes (Table 1), I was deeply impressed by the similarities within those processes even when the circumstances varied greatly. Below I have distilled these similarities along with insights from the memorial designers into lessons on the process of designing memorials and lessons on the campus planning that is involved with such a project.

### LESSONS ON THE DESIGN PROCESS

Designing these memorials involved many people, including various campus constituencies, the family and friends of the people being memorialized, and people with needed professional expertise—landscape architects, campus planners and architects, and/or artists.

**Use a participative process.** As a first step, the teams working on these memorials sought ideas from the community. Various methods were used for gathering input and perspectives from important audiences:

- direct conversations with relatives of memorialized individuals,
- open meetings for alumni and local community members,
- online surveys to the campus community,
- informational tables on campus,
- community meetings open to all members of the campus community, and
- design ideas solicited from the campus community.

**Engage fully and empathetically.** Memorial designers are quite often working with people who are heavily emotionally attached to the events and people being commemorated. Using an inclusive design process—in which multiple audiences were given space to share their opinions and vision—helped those responsible for each memorial garner support for the process and direct the energy of the community into constructive tasks and conversations as the memorial progressed. As one participant shared,

“... to process tragedy and deal with the [people] that have very—sometimes very emotional feelings about the project and process because of what it represents—it’s not easy. It’s a challenge. And it

takes a lot of empathy, which takes a bit of your soul too. And I think [memorials] are simultaneously emotional and intellectual projects to undertake as a designer.”

This participant touched on a sentiment that all of the people interviewed for this study shared: designing a structure intended to commemorate both human life and community tragedy is a process that requires a willingness to engage emotionally, intellectually, and personally with the people and community most impacted by the tragedy and most likely to visit the memorial space once completed. The Sam Dubose memorial bench on the University of Cincinnati (UC) campus is the second such bench on that campus, with the first dedicated to Everette Howard, Jr. In discussing the design decision behind these memorials, one of the designers shared that “it has to do with a place, a place for ... grieving mothers. And I know Everette’s mother, she does come to [visit the bench]. It’s still part of the university, but [it’s a place where] she can come and she can pause.”

**Establish guiding criteria.** Even while seeking and gathering input as broadly as possible and being open to different options for the memorial design, there was a need to have criteria for the design process. Some of these criteria will be defined by the size and location of the site for the memorial, while other criteria may be defined by standards or guidelines regarding placement or design of memorials on campus spaces. As a physical memorial will consume space and resources, two things that are often at a premium on college and university campuses, some campuses have specific policies regarding where memorials can be placed. In this way, the first memorial constructed on campus can set a precedent for similar future projects.

When it comes to siting memorials, design teams should consider the impact on the natural, physical, and constructed environments on campus. In deciding where to place the Sam DuBose memorial at UC, the team considered this, decided on a few options, and presented those options to the family. With the Sean Collier memorial at MIT, the team developed five potential memorial designs and then conducted design studies to test different campus-based sites, scales, and materials before landing on its final design, which is officially designated as one of MIT’s public artworks.

**Document everything.** The final piece of advice from participants on memorial design was to document the process. Documenting the process leaves a record for future generations to learn from, either as they make sense of existing memorials and how they came to be, or as they consider the process of designing a new memorial. A thorough example of publicly documenting memorial design is given in Johnson's (2013) *Finding Freedom: Memorializing the Voices of Freedom Summer*. This book offers a comprehensive accounting of the events that encompassed the Summer of 1964, dubbed "Freedom Summer," including essays from some of those who were involved as college students, reflections from the architect who designed the Freedom Summer memorial, and sketches of the memorial during the design phase.

Many memorials, like the Sean Collier memorial at MIT and the developing Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA, contain several symbolic elements that are not readily recognizable to the naked eye. These elements are often only known to the designers and can easily be forgotten or lost if the process is not documented. In addition to recording the feedback from the community and the milestones along the memorialization process, capturing the symbolism and emotions that surround the memorial can be equally informative for future generations. In preparing *Finding Freedom* (2013), Johnson sifted through archival records and contacted living veterans of Freedom Summer to compile what is now a public record of the memorial and the events that led to the memorial. Developing methods to capture this information and make it available to interested parties (e.g., via a webpage, the campus library or archival facilities, etc.) will help ensure that valuable data on the memorialization process is not restricted to a personal file cabinet or memories that will be lost when the responsible person leaves the institution.

## LESSONS ON CAMPUS PLANNING

Campus planning is intertwined with memorial projects in more ways than the aforementioned need to account for how available space is allocated and used.

**Memorial planning can facilitate healthy dialogue.** Permanent memorial structures are often the result of a major campus emergency that involves fatalities. Such emergencies typically spark campus debates over the series of misfortunes that led to the fatal outcome, what missteps were taken, and who is responsible for those missteps. While these debates are often unproductive in reaching resolution,

a memorial gives people on either side an opportunity to recognize the monumental impact that permeates the community and the promise of a space that will offer comfort and healing. In so doing, the memorialization process becomes one in which a campus can begin to commemorate the forceful impact of its recent tragedy on the full community while also opening dialogue on the importance of campus safety—physical, emotional, psychological, or otherwise. In this way, the memorialization process opens new topics of conversation that invite campus safety officials into the campus planning process.

**The process should not be disconnected from campus safety and emergency planning.** Elaborating on the above thought, a study participant noted, “Active shooters [are] real things and get[ting] rid of all your glass [walls and doors is] one extreme ... but our thought is what kind of a community do we build that helps prevent that from happening?” As this discussion continued, the participant highlighted the fact that campus architects and planners need to think of their role as being inextricable from the central mission of student learning and development; designing and planning spaces in which campus life is to happen is a task that should support the institutional mission and must involve engagement with the students, faculty, and staff who inhabit the campus.

**Consider the legacy a memorial will create.** Any addition to the campus landscape will potentially shift the flow of campus traffic and the campus aesthetic, both serious considerations in the process of deciding the design and location of a memorial. Depending on the significance of the memorial and the intended visitors, there may be arguments for siting the structure in a high- or low-traffic area. As one of the UC designers shared, “It’s our role on the campus to think, ‘What am I leaving here? Twenty years from now, what will this be like?’” Each of the teams responsible for the memorials studied carefully considered the impression their final product would leave behind on the current campus community, the broader circle of people impacted by the incident, and future campus inhabitants.

**Seek ways to pause.** Campus memorials quite often involve space to walk around and absorb the details of the structure or to sit and reflect, thus serving as places where visitors are welcome to openly engage with other visitors or to be fully consumed in their own thoughts. In short, they offer what the UC design team called “a moment of pause.” This team ultimately decided, with input from the family of the deceased, to place the memorial in an area of campus that is

specifically designed to offer a pause from the typical hustle and traffic flow of the institution's urban location. The memorial bench is sited along a walking pathway that winds and intersects in ways that are more rounded than the typical linear pathways.

While memorials can be sited or designed in a manner to offer pause, designers should also allow themselves space and time to pause throughout the process. Gathering information for a memorial—from the details of the events being commemorated to the ideas and input from various constituencies on what would be meaningful—can be a complex and difficult process with an overwhelming amount of incoming information. Just as the participant quoted earlier spoke about the process requiring part of one's soul, recognizing this work as soul-touching at the outset may help one establish processes that circumvent emotional burnout midway through the project.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Physical memorial structures are special places within a campus community that simultaneously allow space for people to either individually or collectively participate in remembrance, reflection, and healing. Designed effectively, a memorial will help family and friends recall the life and impact of the deceased and allow passersby to learn about the events and people therein commemorated. Given the amount of emotion, memory, and concern that surrounds memorialization, the design process offers challenges and rewards that differ greatly from those involved with a typical campus construction project. Yet, there are several examples of existing campus memorials for the design and architecture community to rely on and consult when embarking upon a similar project.

## LAST WORDS

### HOW DID YOUR SCUP COACHES SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR PROJECT?

I had two SCUP coaches. Dan Kenny of Page was my assigned mentor and having Dan with me throughout the process as a sounding board was extremely helpful and made this project feel more collaborative. Informally, Kathy Benton of SCUP provided constant support, motivation, and feedback. Together, Dan and Kathy helped me focus on the SCUP audience and which aspects of the data collected would be most interesting and useful to that audience. Early on, Dan encouraged me to focus on the end goal—what information I would want to present to the SCUP audience—an exercise that helped me find a balance between my inclination to theorize about the impact of campus emergencies and memorials and the need to provide concrete, practical findings and tips that can be incorporated into SCUP members' daily work.

### HOW DID THE SCUP FELLOWS EXPERIENCE IMPACT YOU PERSONALLY?

Given my academic background and training, I am quite accustomed to research being a fairly isolated process. Beyond my mentors, there were times when we polled the larger SCUP community about memorials. There was never a shortage of people who were willing to contribute their thoughts and time to my work. The support received from the SCUP community was truly invaluable and has helped me think more broadly about collaborative approaches to research.

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