

# **Pedagogy in Practice**

## **The Process of Building a Cultural Center in Techiman, Ghana**

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This is a brief report on a project that is currently underway in the town of Techiman, a community located in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana, roughly 110 km north-northwest of Kumasi.<sup>1</sup> The people of Techiman are in the process of building a cultural center for the community. The center has been conceived as a place dedicated to the performance of Techiman's cultures. Programmatically, it is a complex space. Our paper will focus on the initial stages of the project that have involved developing architectural designs for the center—a process that has afforded a number of opportunities for collaboration—collaboration between community leaders and the citizens of Techiman, between a community and the academy, and between Ghanaian and American students.

### **The Town of Techiman**

Today, Techiman is a large town. The population of the municipality is estimated at roughly 200,000. Two important factors distinguish it from other large towns in Ghana. The first is Techiman's historical significance as the capital of the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Nana Baffour Asare Twi Brempong II, Techiman Adontenhene, for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

state of Techiman Bono, the successor to Bono Manso—the first centralized state founded in this part of Africa in the fifteenth century. As such, it is regarded as the point of origin for many of the institutions that define the culture of the Akan peoples of central and southern Ghana, and adjacent parts of Côte d’Ivoire. The town, as well as numerous sites located in surrounding districts have great historical significance for the peoples of Ghana.

The second factor is its geographic location. It is situated in a zone of transition between Ghana’s forest and savanna regions and located in the center of the country. This has influenced its growth, especially during the twentieth century, as the site of Ghana’s largest agricultural market. The Techiman market brings peoples from all parts of the country, as well as from neighboring countries. Like most market communities it has a strong cosmopolitan character. Indeed, the *zongo*, or “strangers’ quarter” where peoples from other places have come to settle, has grown considerably since Silverman’s first visit to Techiman in the late 1970s. Today, one finds non-Bono peoples living throughout this quickly-growing municipality. Roughly half of its population is Bono, the other half is comprised of other Akan peoples and folks representing non-Akan groups.<sup>2</sup> Techiman is about as multi-ethnic a community as one finds in Ghana. The diversity of cultural traditions is quite remarkable, and as one might suspect, this kind of diversity, is a source of the community’s economic and cultural vitality, it is also the source of some social and political challenges. The commercial and social dynamics of

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<sup>2</sup> For current demographic data concerning the District of Techiman see, Techiman Municipal Assembly (2006). Techiman Municipal Assembly: Medium Term Development Plan (GPRS II: 2006-2009). Techiman, Techiman Municipal Assembly.

Techiman led the cultural center's Planning Committee to decide two years ago to name the center, "Nkwantananso," a Bono term meaning "place at the crossroads."

### **Previous Work on a "Cultural Village"**

Before describing the current project, a little history. The idea for building a cultural center arose in the mid-1990s. At the time, the French anthropologist, Martin Verlet, working with a group of community leaders in Techiman, developed a plan for what was called the "Takyiman Bono Culture Village."

The proposal that Verlet prepared to describe the project indicates that the cultural village was conceived as a vehicle for "reconstituting and regenerating the traditional forest environment," and for reviving and preserving Techiman Bono history and culture, by "promoting scientific research and knowledge of the past."<sup>3</sup> In addition, it was envisioned as a major tourist attraction for Techiman and Brong Ahafo. Plans for the village included an arboretum, museum, conference hall with a library and archives, artisan's village, commercial center, open-air theater, and a folkloric village, all situated on a nine acre (3.6 hectare) site. Admittedly an ambitious project! Significantly, the cultural village was envisioned as a "community-based" project.

In the late 1990s, committees headed by various community leaders were established. The development of the cultural village was to occur in stages over a ten year period, the first two components being the museum and conference center. An architect was engaged to design the museum and two engineers selected to oversee the building project. Verlet, working closely with the Techimanhene (the paramount chief of

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<sup>3</sup> Verlet, Martin. "Bono Cultural Village (Takyiman): A Community Based Development Project." Funding Proposal, 2000.

Techiman) and the Techiman Traditional Council of Chiefs, secured a grant from the French Embassy to begin construction. The site was cleared of its trees and graded. Soon thereafter the construction on the museum began. Then, in 2001, construction came to a halt. It is likely that a number of factors contributed to this situation. Verlet had moved on to other projects and was no longer regularly working in Techiman. Apparently the project coffers were empty. And then, in September 2003, the Techimanhene, Nana Dotobibi Takyia Ameyaw, a key supporter of the cultural village, passed away. The funeral and the selection and enstoolment of his successor preoccupied the Traditional Council for the following year.<sup>4</sup>

When Silverman visited Techiman towards the end of 2001—the first time he had been to Techiman in twelve years—he was asked by members of the Traditional Council if he might assist in bringing the Takyiman Bono Culture Village to fruition. At that time, he was committed to other projects, but indicated that as soon as he was able to devote some thought and time to the cultural village he would do so. After reviewing Verlet’s original proposal and site plans, it was clear that this was certainly a project worth pursuing. However, before proceeding a couple of fundamental issues needed to be resolved.

First, as mentioned earlier, the cultural village was originally conceived as a community-based project. This is a critical attribute of the Nkwantanaso initiative that required reinforcement. As the successor to the region’s first state, Techiman has a long and strong tradition of centralized authority. Political and social authority in Techiman

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<sup>4</sup> Despite this ambitious project having stalled, there were a number of other related projects that came to fruition in Techiman at this time. For instance, the community, working in partnership with the Ghana Association for the Conservation of Nature (GACON), developed several important ecotourism sites, perhaps most significant, the Tano Sacred Grove at Tanoboase.

is hierarchical, and flows from the top down, as it does in all Akan states. Indeed, most of the programming and design decisions concerning the cultural village had been coming from the Traditional Council, comprised of Techiman's chiefs, working with Verlet. This is not necessarily a bad thing! There is a critical mass of young, well-educated chiefs in Techiman who are dedicated to the development of the community and improving the lives of the people they serve. Indeed, it is in large part their commitment to Nkwantananso that will insure the success of the project. But in order for the project to realize its full potential some of their decision-making authority will need to be shared with the community.

Second, a related issue concerns the involvement of "outsiders" such as the authors of this paper or Verlet. The expectation that an outsider should serve as the primary driving force for Nkwantananso is problematic. It may be that one of the reasons the original effort stalled was because the primary impetus for the cultural center was not situated in the community. We are not convinced that our vision of what this institution should be is necessarily the best vision . . . how can it be? Though we know something about Bono culture and history, we are not from the place, we did not grow up in Techiman, we don't live in Techiman. We may study Bono culture, write about it, but we don't practice it. One of the fundamental flaws in many of the heritage preservation schemes that have been pursued in Africa over the last 50 years, is that they are based on Western theory and practice. The vision for Nkwantananso must come from within the community. Thus, those of us who are not citizens of Techiman may serve as catalysts or facilitators. As outsiders, we can assist in bringing together the various stakeholders so that they might share their views and insights about what

Nkwantananso might be. We might also assist in mustering the local and external expertise needed to conceptualize and build the center. More about this in a moment. However, it is important to underscore that though one can certainly learn from the experiences of others—looking at similar projects elsewhere in Ghana, Africa and the world—it is critical that a cultural institution such as Nkwantananso be grown locally. The involvement of the community is critical. Along the same lines, it is critical that the impetus for Nkwantananso reside in Techiman, that the members of the community who have invested in the project move the process through its various stages. To this end, the project should be an exercise in a democratic process that involves the sharing of ownership, authority, and knowledge. Admittedly, this is a considerable challenge, but not an insurmountable one. The planning team for Nkwantananso has come to realize that the process of creating the cultural center may be as important as the finished product. It is anticipated that one of the outcomes of the project will be enhancing the requisite capacities for pursuing other community-building initiatives.

Ultimately, what the people of Techiman are attempting to create is not only a space where culture can be performed and shared, but public space that is politically and socially neutral—a safe, inviting space where people can meet to exchange ideas. Sociologists who have been thinking about how civil society is constructed and sustained have coined a term for such a space. These sites are referred to as third spaces or places.

A third space is a physical place that is socially situated between work and family life. In the words of Jon Van Til it is a “place between the mega-organizations of society and the tiny islands of our family lives. A place to link, to network, to communicate, and

to live out the fact that modern life involves connecting individuals to larger systems that affect their daily lives.”<sup>5</sup>

### **From Village to Center**

In the summer of 2005 the Nkwantananso Planning Committee fixed a five-year schedule for the development of what was then conceived as a cultural **center** as opposed to a cultural **village**. Emphasis had shifted to thinking of the institution as fundamentally a community-oriented resource, a resource with the allied goals of celebrating and preserving the diverse cultural traditions of Techiman, not only Bono tradition, but the traditions of the various peoples that comprise Techiman’s population. As such, “Nkwantananso: Cultural Center of Techiman,” promises to offer various groups a social space to perform their cultures for themselves, but also for others. It is envisioned as a space for the celebration of ethnic and cultural diversity that will engender respect for difference among the peoples of Techiman.

The basic building program that was developed during the first iteration of the project is serving as the basis for planning and discussions in the community. The first year of the five-year plan has been completed. During the year the community accomplished a number of tasks. First, the Nkwantananso Planning Committee acquired the assistance of two members of the archaeology faculty at the University of Ghana (Legon), James Boachie-Ansah and Kodzo Gavua, who came to Techiman in January 2006 with a group of undergraduate students to conduct an archaeological survey of the

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<sup>5</sup> Van Til, J. *Growing Civil Society: From Nonprofit Sector to Third Space*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000: 125.

site where Nkwantananso is being built.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly important because the location has considerable historical importance for the Fante people of coastal Ghana who, according to tradition, originally lived at the site before migrating to the coast. This archaeological work generated a good deal of interest in the community and contributed to elevating awareness and commitment to the broader project. Similarly, members of the architecture faculties at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi and the University of Michigan (UM) in the U.S. worked with their students to begin thinking about the spatial configuration of Nkwantananso. Both George Intsiful at KNUST and Jim Chaffers at UM dedicated their design studios during Winter 2006 to the cultural center project.

### **KNUST Design Process**

The KNUST students began their school term working on a different project, but when the proposal to collaborate with architecture students from UM on the Nkwantananso project arose, Intsiful and his students jumped at the opportunity. We should point out that there already was a precedent for such collaboration—the architecture programs at KNUST and UM, several years ago, signed a Memorandum of Understanding that established a formal partnership between the two institutions. After a series of discussions and seminars, Intsiful and ten Kumasi students visited Techiman where they “walked the site” and met with Techiman’s Traditional Council and various municipal leaders. The Kumasi team, therefore, acquired primary or firsthand knowledge of site and context. In addition, having grown up in Ghana, the KNUST

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<sup>6</sup> Boachie-Ansah, J. (2005). "Excavations at Techiman, Brong-Ahafo Region, Ghana." *Ghana Studies* 8 2005 [2007]: 39-101.

students were more familiar with the social and cultural setting than their Michigan counterparts.

Not surprisingly, there were very obvious differences in the final works presented by the Kumasi student designers. Almost all the students alluded to the enigmatic double umbrella of the Techimanhene in their solutions. This is the only paramountcy in the entire country with such an umbrella. The result was that in the initial stages, virtually all the KNUST students were including literal references to Akan cultural symbols in their architectural designs. Intsiful encouraged his students to move beyond this, emphasizing that there are other means for approaching the conceptualization of the Nkwantananso space. He explained, for instance, that one might take a cultural symbol as a point of departure and abstract its form, and that in such situations it is not necessary to make explicit reference to the original symbol, except when summarizing the design process.

The group met twice in a week—specifically on Thursdays and Fridays – to present and review the students’ work. Each student did his/her own literature review and tried to find out as much information as possible about Techiman. A site plan obtained from the Techiman Municipal Assembly served as the canvas for the students’ designs. Intsiful encouraged each student to formulate his/her plans based on the original program for Nkwantananso noted above. The schemes were presented as architectural drawings made up of floor plans, sections, elevations, perspective drawings and working models in cardboard, wood and Styrofoam. The students were encouraged to complete three-dimensional renderings which are usually more easily comprehended than two-dimensional drawings by the average person. At the end of the day, each

student also produced computer-generated drawings. To these, the students added color and various textures. Throughout this process, emphasis was placed on architectural theory and philosophical approaches to design.

IN the past, the KNUST Department of Architecture has pursued a very pragmatic approach to architecture. This has been necessitated by the fact that limited building materials are used for construction in Ghana. In addition, the Department has also emphasized three basic design elements: *commodity*, *firmness* and *delight*; to this may be added a fourth, *appropriate climatic response*. Consequently, for example, many of the Kumasi students configured structures using the concept of a courtyard that affords optimal cross-ventilation. In a few cases, students attempted to demonstrate that they were aware of the latest construction technology and materials in the USA and Europe by using materials such as Teflon, unusual structural systems, as well as mechanical means of ventilation.<sup>7</sup>

### **UM Design Process**

Reflecting on programmatic requirements drawn from a series of trans-Atlantic discussions initiated and sustained over the years by intermediary, Ray Silverman, Jim Chaffers and his UM studio envisioned the Nkwantananso task as one of giving concrete form to a kaleidoscope of activities—a ‘kaleidoscope’ centered essentially around the idea of a public space consciously designed for knowledge generation, knowledge exchange, and knowledge celebration; a safe and inviting space where culture can be

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<sup>7</sup> Generally, models produced by the KNUST students were working models that were not as extensively detailed as those from UM. The wide range of modeling materials available in the northern hemisphere was clearly visible here.

shared among the citizens of a multiethnic community. More specifically, each student designer was challenged to choreograph a spatial palette for a variety of activities, including:

- A common space for *public greeting and welcoming*  
An **orientation center** (for Techiman District and surrounding area)
- A space for public viewing of art and artifacts  
A museum and gallery (including a modest sales shop)
- A sheltered space for accommodating large *public meetings and performances*  
An **auditorium and digital theatre** (seating approximately 300)
- Sheltered space for accommodating *artisan production, demonstrations, & sales*  
A suite of **craft stations** (kente weaving, adinkra cloth-stamping, wood carving, metal working)
- A space for *archival storage/sharing and public reading*  
An **archive and library**
- A space for *small group meetings and presentations*  
A **conference center**
- A space for *public celebrations, performances, and ceremonial reviews*  
**Open-air durbar ground**
- A space for *recasting and reconstructing 19<sup>th</sup>-century “traditional” architecture*  
A **folkloric village**
- A space for *food preparation, family eating, and public entertainment*  
A **restaurant and juice-bar**
- A space for *public computer access*  
An **internet café**
- Space for *cultivating and experiencing varieties of native & exotic plant species*  
A **botanical garden and arboretum**

In addressing the complexity of this multifaceted program, the UM studio sought to create an harmonious whole that would serve a diverse audience of local folks as well as visitors from elsewhere in Ghana and abroad.

Drawing upon secondary knowledge of Ghana and Techiman—through books, journals, magazines, and Ghanaian music—and secondary knowledge of the site through

photographic images and oral narratives presented by Silverman and Chaffers, the UM studio came to understand its larger challenge as one of designing creatively and innovatively within the collective ecology of equatorial Africa; first, by giving close and continual attention to primary Ghanaian life themes (a cosmology of “sacred ritual space and symbolism,” “education as a public resource,” “the extended-bonding presence of family,” *et al*) and, second, by giving particular attention to the climatic demands of tropical Ghana. Specifically, Michigan students were challenged to design sustainably, that is with regard to cultural and spiritual well-being and with regard to material and climate-conscious harmony. With more specific regard to materials and climate, UM students were challenged to design in harmony with prevailing southwest wind currents, limitless solar energy, dry wind-blown sand coupled with high humidity, high temperatures, and brief, but torrential bursts of rain. In short—while remaining conscious of their need to work harmoniously within an ever-present *cultural* milieu—the UM studio sought to conceive structures and spaces that would shed water, introduce shade wherever possible, and interweave a construction system of vertical “open-hands” for natural chimney-draft and optimal cross-ventilation. More broadly, every Michigan student was challenged to think about designing in ways that would facilitate natural cooling and drying within an expansive palette of solar harmony. To this end, without exception, every UM design for the Nkwantananso space gave unique expression to each of the following design elements: open-atrium courtyards, sheltered (but open) exterior stairs, double-sided verandas (for ease of indoor/outdoor living), thick walls and unrestricted wind passages, creative sky-lighting, ventilated block . . .

along with heat-absorbing and heat-reflecting color for selected walls, floors, and ground surfaces.

Contextually, students were challenged to reconcile a flat, sun-swept, mostly-grassless, ceremonial area—one, offering minimal shading and *extended* vistas—with a uniformly sloping landscape of high grass and trees offering maximum shading and *limited* vistas. As a conceptual point of departure, UM students were asked to consider celebrating the sloping, tree-lined building site as a “rite of botanical passage” providing an opportunity to remind us, all, that we are integral parts of a larger Creation . . . not separate from it. Aiming to build upon this awareness, all members of the UM studio were encouraged to give fullest attention to relations of ecological interdependency and were reminded again and again, that they were obligated to craft their designs in such a way as to ensure a connectedness with the earth—a connectedness that would allow for maximum formal and informal gathering on the sited ground plane. Achieving such “connectedness” required each student to think about, among other things:

- Carefully pruning the existing tree canopy to allow for broader penetrations of sunlight
- Clearing underbrush and stabilizing the ground surface
- Introducing flowing palettes of hued ground color
- Limiting ground plane footprints
- Introducing flowering beds of natural ground cover
- Introducing maximum opportunity for “landscaped seating”

In general the overarching pedagogical theme of Chaffer’s UM studio, “*an ark for learning within an unbounded sea of possibilities,*” served to guide what very quickly became a common student quest . . . to engage the Nkwantananso project as a unique opportunity; specifically, as a unique and unprecedented opportunity to share talent on a global stage within a global arena. This backdrop further served to generate intense

excitement within the studio to move beyond normal “comfort zones,” towards an architecture uniquely appropriate for a “place at the crossroads” in Techiman, Ghana, West Africa. Without exception, Michigan students sought to literally “break out of the box” (their own “box” of thinking) with their proposed designs. Thinking broadly, each accepted the challenge of engaging the Techiman site as one imbued with “light and porosity” and multiple (intangible) “thresholds of passage” richly interwoven with obvious elements of context and structure. More specifically, as studio work unfolded, Michigan students came to appreciate and understand the Planning Committee’s vision for Nkwantananso as a politically and socially neutral (“welcoming”) space committed to *celebrating* ethnic and cultural diversity.<sup>8</sup> UM students were also encouraged to view their Nkwantananso designs as potentially compelling expressions of 21<sup>st</sup>-century African architecture—an architecture of ‘practical beauty’— reflecting rich and enriching composites of space *and* spirit (“*spacespirit*”). Michigan students were further encouraged to view Nkwantananso as a locale of unique climatic realities and great historical significance; a locale requiring deep intuitive and intellectual probes . . . primarily, for clues of ritual and ceremony possibly enmeshed within its rich tapestry of ancestral memories and stately cultural aspirations. In broadest terms, as studio work continued to evolve, Michigan students essentially chose to embrace the overarching design challenge of imagining the Ghanaian ‘west**african**landscape’ as complex layers of **ecology**, culture, and spirit—a *fluid* topography of: cooling breezes, textured vegetation, recycled trees, flowering color, sacred rituals, open-air courts, tiled roofs,

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<sup>8</sup> **Diversity** being understood as . . . “a quality of well-being achieved when we, each, choose to exercise our personal empowerment in ways that sustain larger human connections between ourselves and others. Hence, as an act of highest collaboration, diversity is not about being different *from* others, but being different *with* others.” From J. Chaffers’ essay, “Spacespirit,” which appears in this volume.

pounding rain, masonry screens, animals and livestock, rhythms of shade, rhythms of visual and performance art, buzzing insects, school uniforms and back packs, nature reserves, muffled cries, ocean waves, laughing children, raised ground, reggae music, dancing ground, rising sun, blazing sun, setting sun, 'moon-lit' nights . . .

### **Studio Travels**

At the end of the semester, the designs of all twelve UM students went through a rigorous critical review. Three were selected and shipped to Ghana. The authors of these designs traveled to Ghana in May 2006.

When the team from Michigan arrived in Kumasi, the two groups of students engaged in a review at the KNUST Department of Architecture during which students from both Michigan and KNUST presented their individual schemes for Nkwantananso to their fellow students and mentors. After this group critique, the joint team departed Kumasi for Techiman where seven individual projects—the three from Michigan and four from Kumasi—were presented to members of the Nkwantananso Planning Committee.

### **Presentations in Techiman: KNUST Recollections and Reflections . . .**

If the presentation of the schemes from the KNUST and UM students in Kumasi was interesting, the exchange in Techiman was even more interesting. This was largely because the presentation was made to the Nkwantananso Planning Committee and later to a larger audience which included chiefs of the Traditional Council, members of the Techiman Municipal Assembly and members of the general public. The members of the

Planning Committee in particular offered a lot of questions and comments. They were greatly impressed with the amount of work the students had accomplished. They asked a variety of questions ranging from whether local dishes would be served in the cultural center to whether funeral rites could be performed at the center during weekends as is the current custom in Techiman. They also inquired about a VIP section for the chiefs and other local and visiting dignitaries in the auditorium. They asked about how visitors would move through the center and further inquired about parking spaces for both cars and buses. They certainly knew what they wanted! The members of the Planning Committee were keenly interested in the double umbrella concept that a number of the KNUST designs featured, noting that it is unique in the whole of Ghana and as such might serve as a powerful visual symbol for Techiman. The feedback the architects received from the Techiman community was considerable. Needless to say, these observations and recommendations will be integrated into the next iteration of plans for Nkwantananso.

The members of the Planning Committee learned a great deal attending the students' presentations of their plans for Nkwantananso, studying the drawings and three-dimension models, and having a opportunity to speak with the students as well as Intsiful and Chaffers. The students and their mentors also learned a good deal from the feedback they received from the members of the Committee. The products, both tangible and intangible, that this exercise yielded were quite remarkable. In the end, the design of one of the UM students, Hyuntak Oh, was selected. After the UM-KNUST group left Techiman, the models and drawings for the cultural center were displayed in a

municipal exhibit hall and thus made accessible to members of the Techiman community.

### **Presentations in Techiman: UM Recollections and Reflections . . .**

The overarching recollection of UM professor Jim Chaffers and his Michigan students was that their presentations to the Nkwantananso Planning Committee were well-received and well-understood. All UM students recall that the 3-dimensional modeling of their design ideas (expressed via 1/8, 1/4, 1/2, and full scale 1:1 representations) were particularly engaging and useful . . . facilitating questions of considerable depth and detail. It is perhaps useful to note, here, that within the UM studio—home-based in Ann Arbor, Michigan (USA)—Jim Chaffers often lectures on what he understands to be the ‘poetics’ of model-making. For Chaffers, precision-scaled architectural models are essentially ‘built drawings’ — ‘built drawings’ of enfolded layers, best understood as tools for facilitating architectural *investigations* rather than as mere illustrations confirming prior conclusions. At the end of his lectures, Chaffers typically poses a question to ponder. Recently he asked, “What insight beyond the drawing does the model bring to analysis?” Having already fully embraced their studio professor’s ideas about the value of model-making, UM students were in agreement that their models served to ***stimulate*** very engaging questions—particularly, questions about size (volume), material (textures), construction (details), and the relationship of proposed spaces to each other. They also agreed that the scaled precision of their models served to ***facilitate*** consistently high levels of comprehension and understanding.

Reflecting further on interactions in Techiman, students recall that there were frequent questions about proposed locations of durbar grounds. Students also recall several questions about the proposed placement of sheltered spaces and ‘open-air’ courts on the site (particularly, their solar orientation and potential for collecting and channeling heavy rain water).

Upon deepest reflection, Chaffers and his Michigan students are in full agreement that the Nkwantananso experience can only be described—if, at all—as the most **fruitful** of collaborations; a fruitful ‘giving and receiving’ yielding insights and memories for a lifetime.

It is interesting that the designs that emerged from the two groups were quite distinct, reflecting the students’ disparate experiences, and perhaps the unique pedagogical and ideological orientations of their mentors.

### **Other Community Engagements**

In addition to the architectural work, the museum studies students from UM developed a research strategy to gather information about the community’s perceptions regarding the cultural center. Students from the two universities collaborated in small teams with several people from Techiman to conduct a survey of a cross-section of the community to learn how much people knew about Nkwantananso, to ask what kinds of activities they would like to experience at Nkwantananso, and to ascertain whether or not they would be willing to support the Nkwantananso project. Further research was undertaken this year by seven students from the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and KNUST. In the end, over 100 interviews were conducted. The survey

yielded some interesting responses, and also served the vital role of beginning to instill in members of the Techiman community a sense that their involvement was valued and important. One of the unanticipated outcomes of the survey was piquing the interest of junior and senior secondary school students, a stakeholder group that the Planning Committee assumed had little interest in local heritage. It occurred to the Planning Committee that involving seventeen- or eighteen-year-old students in future planning and implementation activities might empower some of them to actively participate in the mission of Nkwantananso. Indeed, the youth of the community are a key target audience, for they are the ones who will sustain and shape the traditions of the past in the future.

Even in its early stages, the Nkwantananso project has created opportunities for collaboration among groups of people who formerly did not have much to do with one another. A very fruitful partnership has been forged between the community and the academy. Involving university students and faculty in this sort of outreach activity represents a model for engagement that will continue to yield enriching experiences for both parties. Certainly our efforts in Techiman speak directly to the benefits of “collaboration”—particularly, to its value as an active, hands-on demonstration of mutual sharing and commitment—where “intentions” of commitment are literally challenged and translated into practical agendas of performance and achievement.

The project also is providing a vehicle for the chiefs of Techiman to engage in a democratic exercise in which they are sharing authority with their subjects—the people they serve. In this context, it is important to point out that Techiman is currently in a position in which it has never been before. We mentioned earlier that a good number of

chiefs who comprise the Techiman Traditional Council, including the Techimanhene, Nana Oseadeyo Akumfi Ameyaw IV, are well-educated—some hold second university degrees—and are completely dedicated to the future of their community. They are individuals who greatly respect the traditions of the past, but also look towards the future. They understand the dynamics of social change. The Traditional Council has a strong working relationship with the Municipal Assembly in Techiman. Indeed, this stable and progressive political environment is providing a solid foundation for Nkwantananso.

One of the biggest challenges facing the planning group is maintaining momentum—making sure that the planning and building processes move along at a reasonable pace. In May 2006, and again in work completed in May 2007, the university students who conducted the community survey learned that one of the major concerns voiced by citizens of Techiman is that the project will not be completed. Many of the people who were surveyed cited examples of important projects that had been started but never finished. Some folks are skeptical, but the planning team is cognizant of the importance of setting reasonable expectations and being able to demonstrate progress.

## **Conclusion**

Nkwantananso is a work in progress, it is also a work in process. In summation, it seems that if the momentum that has been building in Techiman can be sustained and progress continues, the community will succeed in realizing its dream for a cultural center. However, it is absolutely critical that the community remain committed to and engaged in the project. Nkwantananso offers a compelling environment for collaborative

learning—the process of planning the cultural center has created a dynamic environment for capacity building for both the people of Techiman as well as students and faculty at Ghanaian and American universities.