

## A Case Study Speculating on the Possibilities.

This project was funded by the Mississippi State University Office of Research. The MSU students involved were Asad Bakeer, Brian Bassett, Andrew Butler, Kimberly Crossnine, Kevin Degrauw, Ryan Dingus, Chris Eidt, Mike Hutto, Tracey Johnson, Tammy McMahan, Tami Oddo, Jared Pierce, Arisra Stamps, Paul Waddell, and Giles Yokel. The studio professor was David Perkes. Brian Wiginton and Brian Bassett compiled the final report, directed by Shannon Criss.

### Background

The Small Town Center of Mississippi State University was contacted by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) to develop a series of suggestions for ways to improve and re-use the Okolona Technical College site in Okolona, Mississippi. Throughout its history, the school, which was established in 1902, provided industrial training for young African-American men and women. In 1965, funding and support for Okolona College was discontinued and the school had no choice but to close its doors.

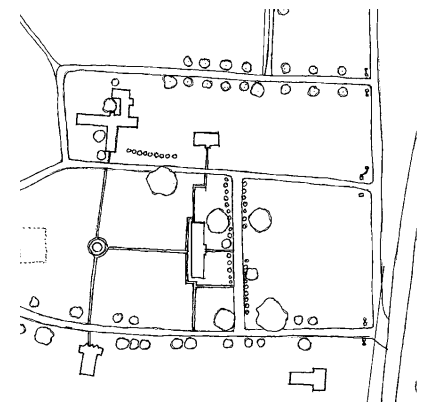
The NCNW purchased the site in 1990 with dreams that training and offering educational services would once again be provided to those in need from Okolona and the surrounding region. Fifteen students in an architectural studio class, taught by Professor David Perkes, were given the opportunity to analyze the site and develop proposals to identify new ways of using the site, renovating the existing buildings, and designing new structures to be built on the site.

### Development

The students first met with Dr. Jesse Mosley, the president of the Mississippi NCNW, who described the history of the college and told them about her visions and dreams of the site's future. The students proceeded by evaluating the buildings left on the site and deciding which ones could be salvaged. Using their understanding of the site and a general program derived from meetings with members of the site committee, the students then began developing ideas on how to re-use the Okolona College site. Each student developed a series of proposals that would be developed over a number of phases. Each phase would call for specific improvements to be made, ranging from cleaning up the site to building new buildings.



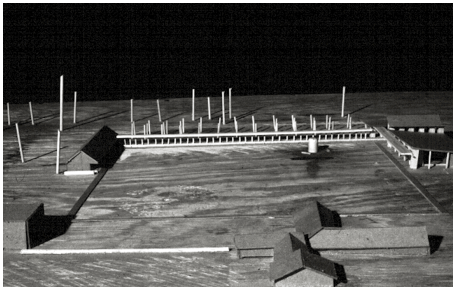
*View of Abbott Hall from the central Pavilion.*



*Site plan of the campus as it existed in 1996.*

*View of Bratton Hall (left), McDougall Hall (right), and central Pavilion (foreground).*





*A model of one student's vision of what the site could become.*

The following page classifies the nine site renewal stages, which have been developed into a fuller document.

*Uncovering a Legacy:* A history of the Okolona College and its site was compiled and documented. The current mission of the NCNW was revealed helping to shape the current program needs for the site. Students spent a great deal of time on the site gaining an understanding and appreciation for its qualities and an inventory and assessment of each building was created.

*Mending the Site:* The inventories and assessments of the existing buildings were further explored. Addressing all present hazardous conditions on the site early, both those that are hazardous now and those that pose potential threats, will help further revitalization efforts be realized more smoothly and more successfully.

*Gaining a Foothold:* What is the smallest move one might make in order to set in motion further development on this site? Better yet, what is the smallest move one might make in order to sponsor greater usefulness on the site right now? A series of proposals were brought to attention to address such issues.

*Reclaiming the Site:* Because of the age of the buildings at the site and because of the amount of time the buildings have been unoccupied, the overall site appears somewhat neglected. Suggestions were made to remove the unsalvageable buildings and save reusable building materials.

*Raising the Expectations:* By this stage, it is vital to the survival of the project to find a way to make it really stand out in the town as a work that people are committed to and that other townspeople can and should become committed, also. Students made proposals for new buildings on the site in response to identified program needs.

*Reactivating a Landmark:* Once the NCNW Site Committee has demonstrated a commitment to this site to the surrounding community, it may be possible to rally support and funding for the renovation of a landmark, existing building. Students made proposals for renovations and additions to existing buildings to address program needs.

*Broadening the Possibilities:* One significant component of a campus environment is the collection of outdoor spaces for students, faculty and local townspeople to gather. With the student proposals, it is possible to imagine the site as a useful and thriving place.

*Rethinking the Site:* With the addition of outdoor space(s), a new building, the renovation of an existing building(s), and the other initial moves, the site will be very different than it is at this time. At this stage, it is possible to think of constructing a new building, or to think of a large-scale expansion or annex of one of the buildings that will comprise the new inventory of buildings.

*Implementing a Plan:* A broad view of the long-term goals is made into a series of suggestions with resources identified to act upon. First, it is important to continue to build a foundation of resources and local support. Second, steps to constantly evaluate and clarify the priorities must be made. Third, it is critical to take inventory of the existing buildings and then to stabilize them so that they are not lost to weathering.

