On September 28th 2007, fourth year students in the systems’ studio of Darryl Ohlenbusch presented their conceptual proposals for the reuse of the derelict former Aztec Ceramics Company site on San Antonio’s East Side at the Claude Black Center on East Commerce Street. Aztec Ceramics produced glazed ceramic tile at the 9 acre site for 40 years before going out of business, leaving behind leaking barrels of glaze products, and extensive areas of contaminated soil where ‘disposal’ of various toxins had taken place over many years.

The genesis of the project was an informal meeting between community members T. C. Calvert and Enrique Valdivia, who had been active in the clean up effort at the abandoned facility, and Ohlenbusch, who suggested the students’ involvement. The students subsequently attended meetings of the Neighborhoods First Alliance, the neighborhood association active in the area, and with the new owner of the property. They were subsequently tasked with envisioning an appropriate use for the property, which features approximately 4 acres of contaminated soil contained under an asphalt “cap”, and formal development of the proposed functional program.

At the final presentation, 17 student proposals were shown to the public. Numerous neighbors from surrounding communities, the owner of the property, and staff from San Antonio City Councilwoman Sheila McNeil, and Texas State Senator Carlos Uresti’s offices viewed the proposals, which remained on display at the Center for two weeks. Functionally, the proposals ranged from uses related to the trucking industry centered in the area, to advanced research facilities for bioremediation and hazardous waste recycling.

Ohlenbusch is a lecturer in the College of Architecture in UTSA, where he teaches third and fourth year design studios.