The Shelter Construction Program is a unique experiential learning opportunity for students to design, build, and live in a structure they have created while enrolled at Taliesin, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture. As part of the “learning by doing” educational approach advocated by Mr. Wright, the program forcefully demonstrates how climate, building materials, site orientation, and client needs and preferences all inform design choices based on the tenets of Wright’s organic architecture. Constructing a shelter engages a student fully in a process of architectural discovery, where inspiration and hard work are joined with fellowship and commitment.

The Shelter Construction Program is rooted in the early years of the Taliesin Fellowship, a training program for architects founded in 1932 by Mr. Wright and his wife, Olgivanna. During the first years of residency apprentices lived in small shepherd’s tents that were made of canvas, set on metal frames attached to a 10-foot square masonry base. As simple variations of tetrahedrons and pyramids these structures not only provided apprentices with housing, but also helped them understand the nature of the vast Sonoran desert in which they lived. Although the Shelter Construction Program has evolved since its founding to include more design choices, all shelters have been built by students living closely with the natural environment, thereby better understanding what Wright envisioned when he wrote in his autobiography:

“To me an architect is a man who...knows the secrets of nature and studies them, is informed by them and comes out stronger with knowledge.”
- Frank Lloyd Wright An Autobiography

All students are encouraged to participate in the Shelter Construction Program to improve their architectural skills, gain a deeper appreciation of the design/build process in relationship to nature, and to participate in a team effort that is remarkably fulfilling.
HOW TO BEGIN

The process of designing and building a shelter in which to live involves either (A) modifying an existing shelter or (B) creating an entirely new shelter:

(A) Modifying an existing shelter comprises 2 forms:

(1) **Major Interventions** that will redesign the structure significantly. These require a student to secure a faculty Mentor and to complete an Independent Study Plan that includes designs of the proposed interventions. Approval from the Shelter Approval Committee is required before interventions begin.

(2) **Minor Interventions** that will repair a shelter damaged by climatic conditions. These require a student to list the needed repairs and discuss them with the on-site Facilities Manager of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

Students must discuss all shelter modifications with faculty and faculty mentors before initiating changes. This will insure that the intervention is successful, financially viable, and provides a student with a positive learning experience.

Desert Perch, designed by Victor Sidy (1999)
(B) **Designing & Building a New Shelter**

Students wishing to design and build a shelter need to submit their proposal for this activity during the start of their Exploration phase. This timing is critical toward insuring that a student completes the shelter and lives in it for a minimum of three (3) months before graduating and leaving the School, thereby enjoying and learning from the experience.

Designing and building a new shelter in which to live requires a student to work closely with a faculty mentor and to follow guidelines established by the Shelter Approval Committee. This exciting and creative opportunity can best be realized by working professionally with others who can contribute their skills and talents to the effort. Although the shelter may initially be conceived of as a student’s individual project, it will only be built through collective work, and ultimately will belong to the ever-changing elements of nature.

Building a shelter is a tremendous learning experience that challenges students to design a structure that protects them from the natural elements while maintaining a sustainable balance between survival and comfort. Although this building endeavor may appear to be simple at the onset, it is an opportunity for students to implement knowledge and skills that are central to becoming an architect.

Through first hand experience students come to understand the forces of prevailing winds, positions of the summer and fall sun, average temperature, rainfall, the nature of materials, and other conditions that strongly influence their design choices. Additionally, students have the opportunity to be client, builder, and architect, thereby better understanding the needs and concerns of each. By working closely with a faculty mentor and with the Shelter Approval Committee this can be a unique and rewarding experience each step of the way.

“Organic architecture sees shelter not only as a quality of space but of spirit, and the prime factor in any concept of building man into his environment is a legitimate feature of it. Weather is omnipresent and buildings must be left out in the rain. Shelter is dedicated to these elements. So much so that almost all features of design tend to lead by one another to this important feature, shelter...”

- *Frank Lloyd Wright in A Testament*
SHELTER APPROVAL PROCESS

Shelter Approval Committee
This committee includes: the Dean of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, a member of the Facilities Committee of the FLLW Foundation, and two (2) Faculty members.

Site Approval & Required ‘Shelter Site Approval Form’

At Taliesin-West, in the fragile Sonoran Desert, only previously developed sites are available for shelter construction. Available sites are indicated on the official Shelter Site Maps maintained by the Facilities Manager and the Shelter Approval Committee.

At Taliesin, in Spring Green, Wisconsin, students may apply for permission to build in the Prairie Shelter Zone.

A student must submit a written request to the Shelter Approval Committee seeking permission to build a shelter and designate a specific site, using the ‘Shelter Site Approval Form.’ The Committee may place additional restrictions on the height, footprint, materials, and character of the shelter based on the location of the proposed site.

Design Approval & ‘Shelter Construction Approval Form’

When a student’s ‘Shelter Site Approval Form’ has been approved he or she may proceed to the next phase, and begin to develop the shelter design. Before a student begins working at a selected site a proposal must be submitted that includes the following: Site Selection, Concept Sketches of the Shelter Design, Building Plan, Faculty Mentor, Timeline, and Budget.

A completed ‘Shelter Construction Approval Form’ must accompany a student’s proposal. Following the review of all materials the Shelter Approval Committee may approve the project or ask for revisions. These revisions must be reflected in the building plan submitted to the Committee for final approval.

Nbada, designed by Michael Heublein (2004)
REQUIRED DESIGN CRITERIA

(1) Building Foot Print
The total site, including landscaping, will be contained within a limit not to exceed thirty feet in diameter, 706 sq. ft. The enclosed shelter can be no larger in footprint than 144 sq. ft. The height of any shelter (structure) will not exceed 12’.0” Shelters adjoining a wash will be measured from the embankment.

(2) Complete Construction Documents,
including: Site plan, including all vegetation, Floor plan with sections and elevations, Structural plan with details. A model of the final shelter design is required.

(3) Site Improvements
Any hard-scape elements, patios, walkways, etc., will be considered to be part of the shelter and should be part of the construction document approval process. Upon completion the site must be re-vegetated to its natural state within a radius of 15’.0”.

(4) Heavy Equipment
Use of heavy equipment, such as a backhoe, small crane, materials trailer, or ready-mix delivery trucks, will be permitted on an individually approved basis but must be used with great care to avoid damage to the site.

(5) Extent of Commercial Fabrication
The extent to which commercial fabrication of components is utilized is subject to review by the Shelter Approval Committee. All commercial involvement in the construction must be made known to the Committee. It is the intention of the Shelter Program that shelter creation be a learning experience by the student.

(6) Protection from the Elements
In keeping with a major objective of the Shelter Program, student designs will offer shelter occupants protection from the elements, such as rain, wind, sun, and wildlife. Students submitting Shelter Construction Proposals must fully consider the comfort and good health of shelter occupants in relationship to the many challenges of nature.

(7) Variance Hearing
Students who wish to propose a design that is outside the required design criteria may request a Variance Hearing from the Shelter Review Committee. Requests should be positive, persuasive, and supported by visual documentation. The Shelter Review Committee will approve or deny any variance requests. This will constitute a final decision.
FOLLOWING APPROVAL

After a student’s design has been approved by the Shelter Approval Committee a student may petition the School for construction funds. The amount of financial support will not exceed $1000, and may be subject to the funds available. In keeping with the constraints of the architectural profession it is important that a student design a shelter that is efficient and economical.

The payment of any funds will be made either 1) directly to a supplier, or 2) as reimbursement for actual shelter expenditures a student has documented in their budget. All other costs for shelter construction are the responsibility of the student.

A student building a shelter is encouraged to seek fundraising assistance and guidance from the Development Office of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. The Development Office has a student shelter in-kind donation process to enable building materials suppliers to make tax-deductible contributions to the shelter program and to receive recognition for their donations.

TEAM WORK

Learning to organize and lead a team of people in a project is an important educational component of shelter construction. Likewise, learning how to participate in a project as a co-worker is important. Students building a new shelter or modifying an existing one are expected to organize a working team using students as the labor force.

As stated above, under ‘Design Approval,’ students planning to build a new shelter will need to organize work teams accordingly. Students who are part of a working team and consistently commit their labor to a shelter project for an extended period of time may complete an Independent Study Plan (ISP), thereby receiving recognition and evaluation for their construction work. The ISP will be evaluated by the faculty mentor associated with the shelter project.

In the event that several shelters and/or modifications of existing shelters happen simultaneously, the approved students are expected to negotiate satisfactorily the allocation of resources.
PROGRESS REPORTS, DOCUMENTATION, & SKETCHBOOK

A student engaged in an approved shelter project will report his or her on-going progress to his or her faculty mentor. Additional documentation comprising photos, conceptual designs, construction documents, and budget should be assembled in a binder notebook that will be submitted to the William Wesley Peters Library which maintains the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture Archives.

Finally...students are encouraged to buy a Sketchbook to record design ideas, climatic observations, encounters with nature, and poetic musings, all of which capture the unique experience of “living architecture” at Taliesin.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Potential donors of funds and materials must be provided with the Official Intellectual Property Statement in advance of any solicitation of donations regardless of the form such donation may take. All students are required to familiarize themselves with the rules governing intellectual property rights.

LIMITATIONS

The School reserves the right to limit the number of shelters constructed or remodeled in any season at its sole discretion. Every student is expected to understand and respect the fragility of the desert landscape at Taliesin West. Any destruction of the desert biome and restoration plan must be approved in advance by the Shelter Approval Committee. These conditions also apply to the Taliesin Wisconsin Prairie Zone.

Abandonment of a shelter construction project for any reason prior to completion is subject to prior approval by the student’s faculty mentor and Portfolio Review Committee. A student abandoning a project may be liable for reimbursement of all grants made to finance the project, including those made by the School and by other donors. Such reimbursement may be a precondition to graduation. All contributions made to the project, whether in cash or in kind, are made by the donor to the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation.

By participating in the program, the student acknowledges that the shelter and its design and images are the property of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. The Foundation reserves all of its rights in this property. Occupancy of a shelter is acknowledged by a student as being at his/her own risk. Upon graduation, unless special permission from the Dean is granted, the student must vacate his/her shelter, removing all personal belongings from it.

Desert Shelter, designed by Chelsea Clark (2011)
“The place for an architect to study construction first of all, before he gets into the theory of the various formulas that exist in connection with steel beams, girders and reinforced concrete, is the study of nature. In nature you will find everything exemplified, from the blade of grass to the tree, from the tree to the geological formations to the procession of the eras beginning with the first from the sea downwards. And when you get a sense in your mind of that continuity and that elemental sense of process according to the nature of materials, you’ll get the basis for an architect’s conceptions, for his practice even.”

- Frank Lloyd Wright An Autobiography
# Student Site Approval Form

**Submittal Requirements**

- [ ] Site

**Student**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
<td><strong>Degree and Year</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Date**

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Shelter Site**

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shelter Site</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of Proposed Shelter (including height, footprint, materials, and character)**

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Proposed Shelter (including height, footprint, materials, and character)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shelter construction is subject to the provisions of the current shelter policy.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty Mentor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dean</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Facilities Manager</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>School Faculty</strong></td>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td><strong>Signature</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Notes**

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- [ ] **Approved**
- [ ] **Denied**
- [ ] **Revise**

**Date of Process**

© 2001-2012 Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture All Rights Reserved
## Student Construction Approval Form

### Submittal Requirements

- [ ] Site
- [ ] Design
- [ ] Budget
- [ ] Timeline

### Site

**Student**

**Degree and Year**

### Construction Period

**Beginning Date**

**End Date**

### Shelter Site

### Budget Estimate

### Live-In Period

**Shelter Construction is subject to the provisions of the current Shelter Policy. Shelter construction may not begin until all signatures have been collected and approved.**

1. **Student**
   - Print
   - Signature

2. **Faculty Mentor**
   - Print
   - Signature

3. **Shelter Construction Approvals**
   - Print
   - Signature

4. **Dean**
   - Print
   - Signature

5. **Facilities Manager**
   - Print
   - Signature

6. **School Faculty**
   - Print
   - Signature

### Additional Notes

- ________________________________
- ________________________________
- ________________________________
- ________________________________
- ________________________________
- ________________________________

### Approved | Denied | Revise | Date of Process

© 20011-2012 Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture All Rights Reserved

SSCR (11/09/2009)