

BUSINESS

UW students help get the Ave ready for face lift

By **CHRISTINE FREY**, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

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UW architectural graduate student Joy Shaw slips between two posters she is hanging in the windows of The Ballet Studio on University Way Northeast. Shaw is part of a project rebuilding and revitalizing facades on the Ave.

Mike Urban/Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Joy Shaw still has some work to do on the window display for The Ballet Studio, but the fresh coat of paint and the 9-foot photograph hanging from the ceiling is already

an improvement.

The dancers captured in the image, one as tall as Shaw herself, nod toward a flight of stairs leading to the business, up one floor from University Way.

Shaw, a graduate architecture student at the University of Washington, is part of a new class launched this spring to develop ideas for upgrading building facades on the Ave, as the street is also known. The 16 students in the studio spent the past few weeks of the school year collaborating with local business owners on designs and preparing to apply for grant money to build them. Though school is out for the summer, some of the students like Shaw have stayed near campus to see their projects through.

Their designs, displayed in an empty storefront on the Ave that they use as a work space, have inspired some local landlords and business owners to improve the look of the area, said Teresa Lord Hugel, executive director of the Greater University Chamber of Commerce

"It's gotten people dreaming again about the U District and what it can be," she said. "That's huge. That's bigger than the facades."

The Ave, which has lost a number of key businesses to the more upscale nearby University Village, is dominated by cheap eateries, clothing boutiques and used book and music stores. Over the years, some of the buildings have become shabby and run down, but many of the small-business owners and landlords don't have the money to make improvements.

The Façade Improvement Program, which started in southeast Seattle in 1992, gives government money to businesses in lower-moderate income areas to help pay for building enhancements. The program got off to a slow start in the University District

when it was introduced there last year; only one building in the area received grant money then.

This year, however, Hugel expects to dole out most, if not all, of the \$64,000 allotted to the neighborhood, primarily because of the students' involvement. She expects to receive as many as eight to 10 applications for grant money by the end of the summer.

Other officials have been so impressed by the storefront studio that the city's Department of Neighborhoods is talking to the university about opening a similar studio in the South Delridge and White Center areas.

Thus far, the students have tackled designs for a shoe store, hardware store and cinema.

Graduate student Cary Westerbeck is working on the façade of a multistory building that houses three Asian eateries and some offices. Dan Karas is trying to refurbish the neon sign at Flowers restaurant and add outside lighting and signage to Ruby restaurant on the same block. And Brody Harris is developing a mural for Radio Shack and a new rooftop deck for Finn Mac Cools Pub.

Peter Johnson, who opened the pub there in October, initially thought the students would just answer some of his questions about building a deck. Then he met Harris, who has developed detailed designs and navigated the permit process for the project.

"The guy honestly hasn't stopped working on it since then," Johnson said.

Now that the university's lease lid has been lifted, there could be even more projects for the students to tackle in the neighborhood, said architecture instructor Jim

[Nicholls](#). The class plans to work out of the storefront studio through the end of September. In the meantime, they're developing designs for the building so its owner can upgrade the space and attract a new tenant.

"Our success there will be in displacing ourselves," Nicholls said. "That's OK."

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