The new major was approved during spring 2013; by semester's end, seven or eight students had already declared it. The goal for the first cohort of students for the experience architecture major in fall term 2014 was 15, but that quickly expanded to 22 declared students and is now 30, including incoming freshmen.

Founding faculty members Liza Potts, Rebecca Tegtmeyer and William Hart-Davidson, who are encouraged by the student response and interest, were working behind the scenes even before the major kicked off.

Potts, who is XA program director and an associate professor in WRAC, says, "The year prior to going live, while the program was going through governance, we were also assembling faculty, beginning with our five core experience architecture members."

In addition to Potts, this includes Hart-Davidson, who is an associate professor in WRAC; Tegtmeyer, an assistant professor of graphic design in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design (AAHD); AAHD's Zach Kaiser, and WRAC's Ben Lauren, each with specific program assignments.

Adds Potts, "We're expanding from there, and recently added our first affiliate faculty member, WRAC's Stuart Blythe."

MSU's experience architecture program is also establishing connections with global high-tech forces such as Google, Michigan-based companies, and top business people. This includes connections in the Grand Rapids health sector, and others in Ann Arbor and Detroit, including Dominos and, most notably, Quicken Loans and its founder Dan Gilbert. Quicken's employee base is 8,000 in Detroit with another 2,000 in the immediate environs, including 1,200 software developers.

Potts and Hart-Davidson add that IBM and others are serving as industry consultants, and noted user experience consultant Keith Instone is the program's Experience Architect in Residence. Instone serves as an advisor to students and faculty, a liaison with the community at large, and a spokesperson for the degree.

"Keith Instone has already visited our classes on multiple occasions to share his expertise," says sophomore experience architecture major Tommy Truong. "It's amazing to have someone with his experience as a resource."

Truong, who began at MSU as a computer science major, says he happened to take a WRAC course, and became intrigued by the department's new experience architecture major.
Experience architecture, or XA, is one “hot,” expanding College of Arts and Letters major. Architecture is an academic term that translates into professional writing. Now, I’m solely an XA major, and I feel it offers me the perfect mix of digital and technology.”

As for where and how XA applies in business, industry as well as research. Both said their parents were a bit concerned about the how and why behind the XA major being created, as non-profits have expressed a strong need for future experience architecture graduates. They’re skilled technologists who have empathy for people and an understanding of human experience. Architects are strategists who lead teams in creating creative and innovative digital solutions.

Richardson’s path to the major was a bit less traditional. “I was initially a chemistry major, and chose MSU over U-M because it offered more in the way of scholarships and high-profile high-tech internships. Senior XA major Meghan Truong agrees, saying, “Our coursework focuses on the principles of user-centered design, best practices in information architecture and the knowledge gained in computer science and programming.”

Richardson will be off to Boston as a user experience researcher for Elemental Technologies, the leading supplier of software-defined video solutions for multiscreen content delivery. Senior XA major Meghan Exploratory, is Portland, Oregon bound to work as a user experience designer for Red Hat, the leader in open source solutions to combine the human experience and the depth of global cultural awareness to produce creative and innovative digital solutions.

“After seeing the brochure, I spoke with Bill Hart-Davidson and fell in love with it,” Truong says. “It’s allowed me to combine user behavior research and human-technology interaction.”

“Experience architecture can be defined as the ability to think creatively, analytically, and productively; to combine the human experience and the depth of global cultural awareness to produce creative and innovative digital solutions,” adds Hart-Davidson, “That’s why the College’s program was designed to expand their knowledge and network. Their resumes and job experience; and study abroad trips will include research-based, team-focused projects;

At least two experience architecture majors have already secured high-profile high-tech internships. Senior XA major Meghan Dallaire, who works with the College’s Creativity Lab, is Portland, Oregon bound to work as a user experience designer for Red Hat, the leader in open source solutions to combine the human experience and the depth of global cultural awareness to produce creative and innovative digital solutions.

Richardson was initially a chemistry major, and chose MSU over U-M because it offered more in the way of scholarships and the know-how to identify and deliver innovative technological solutions.”