Students Domenika Tarazhi and Stephen Nisbet credit the College’s Urban Studio program with positively changing their perceptions of Detroit.
The Urban Studio program gives students from both colleges the opportunity to hone their skills through real-life work experiences that are helpful and productive to local businesses, organizations, and entrepreneurs as well as the communities around them. “We are bringing our students’ expertise to organizations that otherwise couldn’t access it and we are doing so in a cooperative learning environment,” said Bill Hart-Davidson, Associate Dean for Graduate Education, who helped develop the Urban Studio program. “For the students, the key is that this is an outside-the-classroom learning experience where they can put their knowledge to work and practice it in a setting with real clients doing some meaningful work.”

There are three main components to the Urban Studio program:

**Connect** – MSU will invite Detroit professionals twice a semester to a consulting fair held in Detroit so they may seek the advice and expertise of our students in areas such as design, web development, information architecture, web accessibility, or event planning. At these events, students will set up booths for professionals to stop by and discuss ways the students may help their business. The professionals will leave with some ideas for their organizations while students gain valuable skills practicing their craft and communication skills.

**Engage** – Organizations are invited to explore in more detail the topics covered at the Connect events or to work more closely with the students for longer periods of time on solving a problem. This will give students the opportunity to further practice their craft while helping organizations reach their goals.

**Immerse** – Students will be placed into internships each summer where they live and work in Detroit and experience the city’s diverse culture and history.

“We hope that Connect builds to Engage, Engage builds to Immerse, and Immerse builds to Career,” said Scott Schopieray, Assistant Dean for Technology and Innovation, who is helping lead the Urban Studio program.

The Immerse portion of the program launched this past summer with four students interning at three different Detroit organizations, including the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Historical Society, and Quicken Loans. The students received internship credit, a stipend, free housing at Wayne State University, one free meal per day, and were connected to all the other MSU programs and things happening in Detroit during the summer.

“This is a learning experience that goes beyond just the internship itself. It has allowed me to learn more about myself,” said Stephen Nisbet, a senior majoring in English and Professional Writing, who interned with the Detroit Institute of Arts as part of the Urban Studio program. “Growing up in a small town in mid-Michigan and being able to spend an extended period of time in Detroit has exposed me to how city life works and how a city’s people interact with each other and the city itself. I’m thankful for this opportunity because not only do I have a better idea of what I may want to do after college, I also have a better understanding of where I may like to be.”

As part of the internships, the students took a one-credit, two-week course – Detroit in Context – that covered the history of Detroit. The course was taught by Associate Professor David Sheridan in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities, who also helped develop the Urban Studio program.

The full Urban Studio program will be available this fall when the Connect and Engage portions of the program begin. Any Detroit business or organization is invited to participate. Prior to the Connect events, training and practice sessions will be held for students who are interested in participating.

The plan is to eventually launch the Urban Studio program in different Michigan cities. The program started in Detroit as part of a broader MSU effort, DETxMSU, an initiative by Michigan State University to offer more experiential learning opportunities in Detroit.

“We really want to form meaningful connections with the people in the city of Detroit,” Hart-Davidson said. “That follows a broader institutional strategy that we should bring to Detroit what we do best, which is engaged teaching and research.”

For more information on the program, see the Urban Studio website at urbanstudio.cal.msu.edu.