Faculty Development Grant Report
Alex Slade, Fine Arts, March 16-24, 2013

In the spring of 2013 I received a Faculty Development Grant in support of travel for a project I'm doing photographing in the Great Plains. On March 16th I boarded a plane for Kansas City, where I rented a car and spent a week driving around Kansas and Oklahoma.

I find the Great Plains fascinating. After reading William Least Heat-Moon's seminal work, PrairyErth, about Chase County Kansas, and Ian Frazier's book, The Great Plains, I started researching the area. The issues of development, environmental degradation, and history, make it an interesting place for a photographic documentary project. My initial idea was to travel all the way up to the Dakotas and back to Kansas. However, I found it took much longer to accomplish what I wanted in each place I visited. I spent the first two days in Kansas City, a day in Chase County, two days in Wichita, a day in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and two days in Tulsa before returning to Kansas City. I learned a great deal about the landscape of the area, the Flint Hills that run through eastern Kansas and Oklahoma, the tall grass prairie that covers them, and the architecture of the urban areas I travelled through.

Over the week I made over 80 4x5 negatives on my trip and took hundreds of digital pictures. Several of the final images will be exhibited in my upcoming solo exhibition at Edward Cella Art and Architecture. The images fall into two categories: the shifting urban environment and the ruins of modernist architecture, and landscapes focusing on the rural environment and its shift away from agriculture and towards energy production, telecom, and the tourism that accompanies parks and wildlife preserves.

As I present this project to the Otis community, I believe it will be informative across disciplines. I was able to photograph some architecturally significant buildings including Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower in Bartlesville, his Corbin Education Center at Wichita State, and his Community Christian Church in Kansas City, as well as buildings by Skidmore Owings and Merrill and Bruce Goff among others. I plan a powerpoint presentation for the fall and am willing to talk to any classes interested in my findings.

While I found the trip extremely productive and made the bulk of the images for my upcoming show, I found it to be just the beginning of a much larger project. I expect to make repeated trips to the area over the coming year to fill out what I initially started in this grant. Without this Faculty Development Grant I don't know if I would have begun this project, but now that I’ve started I’m sure I will proceed. I appreciate the unique opportunity the school provided me both in terms of financial support and commitment to a project that helped me develop my career as an artist.
Kansas City

Cell Phone tower, Chase County, Kansas
Coyote, Pawhuska, Oklahoma

Tulsa Civic Center