Downtown is resurrection. The re-birth of the cool, the now. The happening happening again. For the first time... from memory... from the sense of living the eternal moment.

–Jack Evans, poet, co-founder/host of Caffeine Corridor Poetry Series at {9} The Gallery on Grand
Downtown is the celebration of the city's un-concealment of our very selves.

–Michael Bartelt, poet and student on ASU’s Downtown campus
## Contents

We Are Downtown: The Project.................................9

What is Downtown..............................................11
  What is a downtown?........................................13
  What is our Downtown?....................................17

Where is Downtown..........................................21
  Mapping Our Downtown.................................23
  Mapping Your Downtown.................................26
  Our Ten Approximate Districts.........................29

Who is Downtown.............................................37
  An Evolving Community of Diversity..................41
  We Are Downtown: The Film...............................43
  The We Are Downtown Partners.........................44
  The We Are Downtown Photographers..................46
  The We Are Downtown Creative Directors..............47
We Are Downtown: The Project

The We Are Downtown project seeks to record the stories generated by and constructed within the diverse community of Downtown Phoenix. Our mission is to strengthen the ongoing relationships between schools, professors, and students at ASU’s downtown Phoenix campus, between ASU and the private and public sectors, and between ASU and organizations and individuals within the downtown community.

Our downtown is distinct from other downtowns. It is comprised of districts that are also distinct from one another. Together, these districts comprise a unique and variegated community, one that is perennially taking shape and being shaped by the hands of the community at large. Thus, the story of downtown is multi-faceted and ongoing. Its expressions are diverse in genre, style, and approach.

The We Are Downtown project will continue to narrate the growth of downtown through community action research, personal narratives (both visual and textual), and artistic expressions. We believe that it is only through the acknowledgement of the variety of people and media that define our community that we will be able to forge connections between downtown Phoenix and ASU’s downtown campus, further elucidating a distinct downtown identity and creating innovative partnerships.

To date, the project has begun to explore the evolution of downtown through community action research, personal narratives (both visual and textual), and artistic expressions, all of which have culminated in the launch of the We Are Downtown documentary film, directed by Adam Waltz
What is Downtown?
What is a downtown?

The students in Tourism Development and Management (TDM) 402 at Arizona State University’s Downtown Phoenix campus began their foray into the We Are Downtown project by grappling with the connotations of downtown and downtown spaces, essentially completing the following sentence:

A downtown is…

a place of hustle and bustle...a place of business and a place where everyone can have fun.

where everything happens.

an area within a major city that has places to go, things to do.

rich with culture and has an abundance of shops and businesses.

the place that takes bits and pieces of surrounding environments in order to create its own unique experience.

a populated area where “city” traffic is [found] throughout the day/night.

an area where people go for work, leisure, school, and daily activities.

a place of business & commerce where the courthouse and other government facilities are located.

a place where the community goes to get together and enjoy sports and other events.

centrally located.
a place where members of the community go to find dinner, entertainment, business, leisure, work, etc.

a place besides work and home...a location where community gather for various reasons.

a city area that has a different vibe….not a suburb or a rural area.

where important agencies have their offices.

a place for tourist to go for different purposes such as dining night life or shopping, and where special events take place, games, concerts.

a center of business for the city.

a word that describes an atmosphere, or better yet, a community that is a get-away from “home.”

the heart of a city.

where events and activities take place for locals and tourists.

a central location where people can enjoy restaurants, shops and cultures.

[a mixture of] very rough areas and nicer buildings.

an urban community.

a melting pot of different ethnicities, social classes, and types of people in general.

museums and lots of tourist attractions...shopping areas and
lots of restaurants.

a corporate culture filled with monotonous jobs and daily activities.

traffic and expensive parking.

the oldest area of the city.

tall buildings, narrow streets, not very convenient for cars.

city life, diversity, risk[-taking], suits, ties…a live scene of people.

the central or main hub of a city… [it] can be accredited to the facts of long-term usage, popularity, and traffic.

a place for business and urban dwelling mixed with [the] eclectic.

the place that takes bits and pieces of surrounding environments in order to create its own unique experience.
What is our Downtown?

Members of the community were then asked to articulate their ideas regarding downtown, and more specifically, what Downtown Phoenix represented to them.

*Downtown is the possibility of art for everybody.*
–Elizabeth McNeil, poet, activist, & Instructor of English on ASU’s Downtown campus

*Downtown Phoenix is becoming more diverse. Before it was just businessmen and corporate industry, but now that ASU has brought a student presence to the area, more people are attracted to living downtown. With the addition of the convention center, ASU downtown, and places such as Cityscape, there is a more diverse community within the Downtown Phoenix area.*
–Downtown Business Owner

*I choose to live in downtown because I want to be centrally located and live in a culturally diverse neighborhood.*
–Downtown Resident

*My Downtown is everything within reach, complete. What I need when I need it. Evolving, vibrant, artsy. "Downtown" has a key word that stands out... "own." Downtown is the place for you to 'own it', Make it yours, make it everybody's When you own it, you are invested in it And My Downtown has a plethora of people who are invested in making Downtown be all it can and should be*
–Leah Marche, founding member of BlackPoet Ventures, Arts & Culture Director for RadioPhoenix.org

*Downtown allows me to express who I am through my work. It allows me to contribute to the urban and hip feel, the new vision of the downtown area.*
–Downtown Business Owner
Downtown is rich, but not rich like corrupt-governments-or-corporate-enterprises rich. Downtown is full, but not full like a congested-metropolis-of-steel-girders-and-concrete full. Downtown is peopled, but not peopled like a sub-division-in-the-homogenized-suburbs peopled.

Walt Whitman would say it contains multitudes.

I’d say it’s won my heart.  
–RD, poet, co-founder/host of Phoenix Poetry Series, Lecturer of English on ASU’s Downtown campus

The best thing about downtown Phoenix is the urban setting which allows me to ride my bike around town.  
–Downtown Resident

Downtown Phoenix has always been very hopeful to me…[the] people here are so passionate about this city in their discourse and belief…[but] It can be so hard to live here sometimes, there's such desolation — and I mean this objectively, in terms of the landscape, climate, all the empty lots — that it creates this kind of existential metaphor, it brings us together in that we're all transient, we're all here, it's so hot out and we're so thirsty, we have no idea what we're doing in the desert, whose idea this was, and maybe this was a terrible idea but we're going to try, we're going to figure it out, and we're going to do the best we can.  
–Jake Friedman, editor-in-chief of Four Chambers, the independent, community literary magazine of Phoenix, AZ

I live in downtown because it is where my family has lived all my life.  
–Downtown Resident

My downtown is a force that ebbs and flows with rhythm. The rhythm of people and machines that move through space, in and out of time, sometimes 3/4, sometimes the swing of 4/4, and others a latin 6/8.

My downtown is a place of contact that forces those of different cultures,
ethnicities, genders, socio-economic positions to see each other, to BE visible. It is a space that holds the potential for greater empathy than suburban geographies.

My downtown is a space of polyphony, voices that sometimes shout, whisper, laugh, cry, and sing. It is a downtown that is in transition and reanimation. Far from the cultural wasteland it once was. It is being reconstructed, refigured, by an influx of fresh ideas and people that decided every great city takes on the personality of her people.

My downtown is a democratic space where we contest the institutions that wish to rule her. It is record shops, coffee houses, a jazz club, a university, The Valley Ho. It is an improvisatory space for those who struggle.

My downtown is the blood that runs through my veins, it is a transfusion for a new Phoenix.
–Mike Pfister, co-founder of CollabX, musician, and Instructor of English on ASU’s Downtown campus

I like to go to the farmers market and get local items to cook with.
–Downtown Resident

I see the future for Phoenix being very bright. I have worked Downtown for many years and have watched it develop for the better in so many ways.
–Downtown Worker
Where is Downtown?
Mapping Our Downtown

To discover the answer to the question *where is Downtown Phoenix?*, students from TDM 402 went to their friends, family, and strangers on the street with maps of the general downtown area. They then asked participants to draw an outline of where Downtown Phoenix was located. After synthesizing over 300 maps, five common patterns emerged, examples of which are displayed below. Ultimately, what the mapping survey made clear was that the location and boundaries of Downtown Phoenix remain unclear to many.

Pattern 1: Succinct, More Traditional Definition of Downtown
Pattern 2: Wider Coverage

Pattern 3: Very Wide Coverage
Pattern 4: Make Your Own Design/Take a Guess

Pattern 5: Blank/No Markings (i.e. No Clue, Did Not Answer, or Did Not Know How to Read a Map)
Mapping Your Downtown

Arizona State University Hosted an Open Door – or an open house event – at its Downtown Phoenix campus on Saturday, March 1st, 2014. During the four hour event, over sixty participants from the downtown area and beyond visited an interactive room where they were asked who, what, and where is downtown Phoenix.

The participants indicated the following on the map to the right:

- Where is the heart of downtown Phoenix? (represented by hearts)
- Where do you go in downtown Phoenix? (represented by people)
- Where areas do you avoid downtown? (represented by exclamations)
- Where is your favorite part of/place in downtown? (represented by flags)
- Where do you live in downtown? (represented by houses)
The Map of Our Downtown Activities
The event also yielded answers to the questions and prompts listed below, the complete responses to which will be assessed and incorporated into the ongoing We Are Downtown project and are currently available by request to ctalmage@asu.edu.

- In one word, what is community?
- What do you like about downtown?
- What do you dislike about downtown?
- What does the word downtown mean to you?
- What is the heart, soul, or spirit of downtown Phoenix?
- What can we all do together to make downtown Phoenix a better place?
- What is your wish for downtown Phoenix?
- Describe your best downtown Phoenix experience.
- Describe your worst downtown Phoenix experience.
- What do you like to do? How does downtown allow you to do that?
- Where do you fit in downtown? What brings you downtown?
- When do you come downtown?
- Who do you believe makes up the heart of downtown? Who does downtown represent?
- Why do you want to see downtown Phoenix succeed? How can you help downtown Phoenix succeed?
- Why would a person choose to live in downtown? Why would a person choose not to live in downtown?
The Ten (Approximate) Districts of Downtown

For the purposes of classification, the students in TDM 402 working on the geographical questions of “location” divided Downtown Phoenix into the following districts or “groups.” Some are zoned and recognized as official districts or neighborhoods by the city and other organizations while others are not. Some are clearly delineated by streets that form perimeters in which they’re nestled, others are less clearly delineated and seem to encompass several neighborhoods. Some are diverse and well-developed in terms of resources, while others are less so. In every sense, what was observed within the districts represent the evolution of Downtown – where we’ve been, where we are, where we’re going.
The Messy Map of Our Downtown Districts
Booker T. Washington District (6th St. to 12th St./Madison to Van Buren)
This district is characterized by abandoned businesses and lots, leaving much room for development and opportunity.

Grand Avenue District (Grand Ave to 7th Ave/Van Buren to Roosevelt)
This district includes housing for seniors and services for those in need via The Fillmore Housing Corporation & The Church on Fillmore (in conjunction with St. Mary’s Food Bank).

East Evergreen Historic Neighborhood (Central to 7th St./Fillmore to McDowell Rd.)
Evans-Churchill District (Central Ave. to 7th St./Fillmore to I-10)
Roosevelt Row (3rd Ave. to 7th St./McKinley to Portland)
People live here for two main reason; the culture of the community, and to be closer to the main downtown area.

The two outstanding downsides to the region that most locals shared was the volume of homeless, the amount of theft-based crime, and the fact that they are living in a food desert.

A major asset of this neighborhood is the Roosevelt Row Arts District, recently dubbed “RoRo.” This area hosts First Fridays, a walkable monthly event that draws students, artists, and people from around the valley. The rest of the month, RoRo features cultural events and night life via numerous restaurants, bars, and live music.

Additionally, the district has two well-established parks with installation art.
Oakland and Woodland Historic Neighborhoods (19th Ave. to Grand Ave. to 3rd Ave./Harrison to Fillmore) (includes Capital District & Government Mall but not the Warehouse District)
Most of the government buildings are located here. It is also home to numerous memorials and parks honoring veterans and prominent figures in Arizona history. The park also memorializes significant wars and other events that have had an impact on the state.

Although housing is not thriving in this area, it is clear that this area holds much of the history of Phoenix and is important to preserve.

Garfield District (7th St. to 16th St./Van Buren to I-10)
Business are rehabilitating old buildings and repurposing them into art galleries, restaurants, and shops. However, new development has pushed long-standing residents out of the Garfield district, changing the level/degree/amount of diversity in the area.

Residents have raised funds to keep the neighborhood safe and clean and to preserve its historic character. For example, they have created a variety of organizations and programs to service the neighborhood’s at-risk youth.

F.Q. Story Neighborhood District (Grand Ave. to 7th Ave./Roosevelt to McDowell)
The region is vastly multi-cultural and expressive, and contains over 600 residential homes.
The neighborhood is architecturally unique compared to the surrounding areas. Many of the buildings are Tudor-style and were built around the turn of the 19th century, making it one of the most aesthetically pleasing/charming neighborhood in Downtown Phoenix.

**Warehouse District (7th Ave. to 7th St./Lincoln to Jackson)**

This is a district with ample space, residencies, historic appeal and charm, as well as police presence.

All of the local restaurants and sports venues are assets to this area, as well as housing the only recycling center in Downtown Phoenix.

The district has capitalized on the nostalgia trend via new local businesses, shops, and restaurants. Vacant lots and parking areas have the potential to be retrofitted for other purposes like a community garden in an attempt to make a more aesthetically pleasing community.

**Roosevelt Historic District (7th Ave. to Central Ave./Fillmore to Portland and/or McDowell)**

The Roosevelt District plays a significant role in the history of Phoenix given its collection of early twentieth century architecture, contributing to the visual diversity and character of the Downtown community.

This district also houses a portion of the Roosevelt Row Arts District, parks, public pools, and the Public (Farmer’s) Market, as well as several nonprofit organizations including The Salvation Army, Arizona Citizen for The Arts, YMCA, and the Irish Cultural Center.
Some feel that empty dirt lots degrade the aesthetic of the neighborhood, but the general lack of modernization is also what maintains the historic appeal.

**Downtown Phoenix Business Improvement District (7th St. to 7th Ave./Jackson to Fillmore)**

**Stadium District (1st St. to 7th St./Jackson to Jefferson)**

The Enhanced Municipal Services District commonly referred to as the Downtown Phoenix Business Improvement District, is the epicenter of one of the fastest growing and dynamic downtowns in the United States.

This area houses Arizona State University’s Downtown Phoenix campus, University of AZ (Phoenix campus), the Mercado, the stadiums of two professional sports teams, Symphony Hall and Herberger Theater, Heritage Square and the Arizona Science Center. Nightlife, dining, and entertainment can be found at the nearby CityScape. An abundance of green, community space can be accessed at Civic Space Park and the Arizona Center.

Downtown Phoenix Inc. has emerged to coordinate the actions of The Downtown Phoenix Partnership (DPP) and the Phoenix Community Alliance to further support the community and economic development of downtown Phoenix.

The METRO Light Rail is an asset to this development in this area.
Unclassified Grand Avenue Area (19th Ave. to Grand Ave./ Fillmore to McDowell)
The buildings are diverse and have an urban feel, and some are now inhabited by thriving art galleries, local bars and unique eateries.

The neighborhood has a reputation for being poorly lit and attracting crime despite the recent efforts at revitalization, but the efforts of artists and local Grand Avenue merchants continue to improve its appeal.

This area is unclassified because no City of Phoenix Development Plan nor Historic Phoenix Neighborhood demarcation was discovered during our research.
Downtown is a place where all different peoples, cultures, and communities can come together...
An Evolving Community of Diversity

Demographics alone do not provide us with the tools we need to understand diversity.

As witnessed throughout the course of the initial investigative phase of the project, the definitions and boundaries of Downtown varied greatly from person to person. Downtown Phoenix is arguably as diverse as its definitions and borders, but who gets to decide who we are and who makes up our burgeoning community?

In our quest to better understand the diversity of Downtown, what we discovered was that *the more possible it seemed, the more impossible it became.*

And so what we discovered was merely the paradox of discovery – the impossibility of identifying diversity amongst diversity.

Ultimately, in order to discover the answer to *who is downtown,* you must first ask, *who are you?*
We Are Downtown: The Film

Phoenix has been decried by the *L.A. Times* as “an easy city to pick on,” but there’s an underground movement that’s been gaining momentum, making its way to the surface, beginning to shine through the cracks left by vacated buildings and failed businesses of a decade or more ago. *We Are Downtown: The Film* highlights the finer points of a city finding its identity – from high-profile ASU professors to artists and activists who are the ethical compass and pulse of the city, *We Are Downtown* is a window into the culture that’s painting the strokes on the canvas of Downtown Phoenix.

Debut date: May 12th, 2014, Film Bar

Adam Waltz, Director
Rosemarie Dombrowski, Creative Advisor
The We Are Downtown Partners

TDM 402 Student Researchers
ASU Downtown Phoenix Campus Students

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
Partnership for Community Development
School of Community Resources and Development
School of Letters and Sciences
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
School of Public Affairs
Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication
College of Public Programs

Downtown Phoenix Podcast
Downtown Phoenix Inc.
Activate Phoenix Events!
Downtown gallery owners, writers & artists, residents

Write On, Downtown
CollabX
Caffeine Corridor Poetry Series
Phoenix Poetry Series
The We Are Downtown Photographers

**Marilyn Napier**, student, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication & *Write On, Downtown* editorial intern

**Marley Molitor**, student, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication & *Write On, Downtown* editorial intern

**Mara Zegarac**, student, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication & *Write On, Downtown* editorial intern

**Photo Credits**

*Cover Photo*, Marilyn Napier

*Graffiti Bench*, Marilyn Napier

*Rising Phoenix*, Marley Molitor

*Meditation Wall*, Marilyn Napier

*Mother and Child*, Marilyn Napier

*Graffiti Wall*, Marilyn Napier

*Graffiti Phoenix*, Marilyn Napier

*Roosevelt*, Marilyn Napier

*Shakespeare & Frederick Douglass*, Marilyn Napier

*Apache*, Marilyn Napier

*Studying Students*, Marilyn Napier

*Man with Guitar*, Marley Molitor

*Aaron Johnson @ Lawn Gnome Books*, Marilyn Napier

*Film Bar*, Mara Zegarac

*World in his Hands*, Marley Molitor
The We Are Downtown Creative Directors

Adam Waltz, Director of The We Are Downtown Documentary Film, 2014 graduate of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication, Write On, Downtown editorial intern, Associate Editor for Four Chambers Literary Magazine

Craig Talmage, facilitator and grant writer of the We Are Downtown project, contributor and co-editor of the We Are Downtown chapbook, Senior Research Associate for ASU’s Partnership for Community Development, PhD Candidate in Community Resources and Development, Instructor of TDM402

Rosemarie Dombrowski, editor of the We Are Downtown chapbook, Lecturer of English on the ASU Downtown campus, editor of the undergraduate literary journal Write On, Downtown, co-founder & host of the Phoenix Poetry Series, Poetry Editor for Four Chambers Literary Magazine