Ravenhill Chapel: An Immersive Deep Dive into Calm

This study investigated how an immersive art installation could reduce stress and improve mood for students, faculty, and staff during final examination week at Thomas Jefferson University. The installation, designed by undergraduate students, featured large-scale projections of calming imagery such as waves, jellyfish, and stars, accompanied by slow, meditative music. The goal was to create a multisensory environment encouraging relaxation, mindfulness, and emotional reset.

Participants completed pre- and post-visit surveys, including the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), to measure emotional changes. A total of 155 respondents provided complete data. Results showed statistically significant decreases in negative emotions such as nervousness, distress, and irritability, and increases in positive feelings like relaxation, inspiration, and rejuvenation. The median PANAS score increased by six points after the experience, indicating a notable improvement in mood.

Qualitative feedback echoed these findings, with participants describing the installation as calming, peaceful, and restorative. Many reported a sense of mental clarity and stress relief, often comparing the experience to meditation or mindfulness practices. Suggestions from participants called for such installations to be available year-round to support student well-being.

These findings suggest that immersive art installations can serve as effective interventions for stress reduction in high-pressure academic environments. The multisensory, absorbing nature of the experience facilitates deep engagement, emotional regulation, and psychological restoration. Future research will explore the long-term impact of such installations and how they can be integrated into mental health strategies on college campuses.

How does your work address the interconnectedness of population health, environmental sustainability, and design disciplines?

The Ravenhill Chapel immersive art installation addresses the interconnectedness of population health, environmental sustainability, and design by transforming a campus space into a sanctuary for mental and emotional well-being. At a time when anxiety, depression, and stress are rising—particularly in university populations—this project provides a non-pharmacological intervention aimed at reducing stress and fostering emotional restoration. The measured improvements in mood and reduction of negative affects among participants demonstrate its contribution to **population health**, offering accessible support for mental resilience in high-pressure environments.

The project also models **environmental sustainability** through adaptive reuse of the historic Ravenhill Chapel, breathing new life into an existing structure without the need for new construction. Energy-efficient projection technologies and LED lighting systems were employed, minimizing environmental impact while creating a visually rich experience.

Finally, this project represents a synthesis of **design disciplines**, combining immersive art, environmental psychology, and health research. It exemplifies how thoughtful design can move beyond aesthetics, influencing mood, focus, and stress levels. By bringing together students, artists, healthcare professionals, and educators in both the creation and study of the installation, the Ravenhill Chapel project demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary collaboration to foster environments that are restorative, sustainable, and deeply responsive to human needs.

What opportunities do you see to foster greater collaboration across population health, environmental sustainability, and design disciplines?