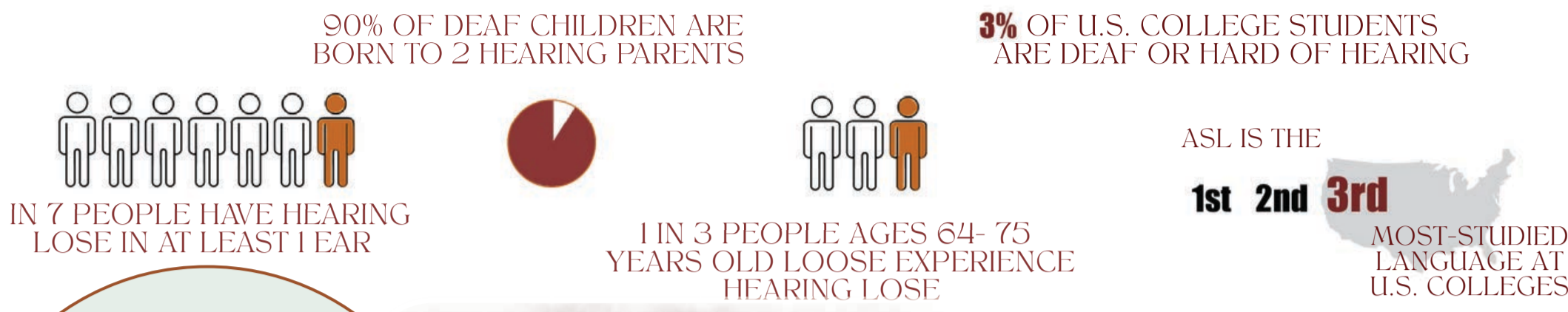


# SIGNS OF EARTH

INTERCONNECTING EXPRESSION: FROM SIGNS TO SCULPTURE

## RESEARCH ON ASL AND DEAF CULTURE



Blending ASL and pottery to strengthen dexterity in the deaf community, with support from local teachers and interpreters to foster visual and verbal communication.

## TECHNOLOGY

Technological projections formed from the path of the wheels along with the fluid motion of sign language is informed in this design, allowing users to absorb into their surroundings and engage their senses.

## TEACHING

### POTTERY PROJECTION CAVE SPECULATION

## DEAFSPACES

- 1.Space & proximity - open layouts & circular design
- 2.Sensory reach - tactical & visual cues
- 3.Mobility & proximity - gentle transitions
- 4.Light & color - use color to guide
- 5.Acoustics - vibrational feedback

## DEAF POWER

**Deaf Power** represents the pride, identity, and cultural strength of the Deaf community. It celebrates Deaf language, history, values, and is symbolized by a gesture. An open palm over the ear followed by a raised fist; that promotes unity and Deaf culture. These are aspects we integrated into our design to offer the best opportunities and connection for the community.

## POTENTIAL USERS OF SPACE

- College students
- Deaf or hard of hearing young adults ages 20-30 and their loved ones.
- This space is for all users wanting to connect, learn, and create. With accessible art classes and studio all abilities are welcome and encouraged to explore, connect, and extend their minds.

## NARRATIVE

The Deaf community communicates primarily through sign language—a visual-kinetic mode of expression—and possesses a strong cultural identity shaped by shared lived experiences (DeafSpace: Campus Design and Planning, 2025). While this community often maintains deep internal bonds, Deaf individuals frequently experience **disconnection or alienation** from hearing friends, families, and peers who do not share their primary language. This gap is not merely communicative but **spatial, social, and cultural**.

This design begins with a provocation: Can art function as a shared spatial and tactile language that bridges this divide, fostering understanding, camaraderie, and empowerment between Deaf individuals and their hearing communities? Signs of Earth responds to this question by proposing a **DeafSpace-centered pottery and ASL learning studio** located on a university campus with a significant Deaf student population. The project positions pottery not simply as a craft, but as a **parallel language**. One rooted in hand movement, dexterity, rhythm, and embodied knowledge. Both American Sign Language and pottery rely on nuanced hand gestures, precision, and intentional motion, making them **inherently compatible** modes of expression. As Savage (2025) notes, "The earliest vessels were modeled by hand, using the finger and thumb," underscoring the deep historical and physical relationship between hands and meaning-making. Pottery becomes a mediating tool. Allowing families, friends, and peers to engage alongside Deaf users in a process that values **visual attention, touch, and movement over sound**. In doing so, the space reframes communication as collaborative and experiential, rather than hierarchical or exclusionary. Natural materials and a strong connection to the surrounding campus ponds **reinforce themes of flow, growth, and reflection**. Mirroring both the physical process of shaping clay and the evolving relationships formed within the space. Water, light, and openness support **visual clarity and uninterrupted sightlines**, which are essential to successful signing and DeafSpace principles.

Externally, the studio offers **immersive projected installations, hands-on pottery wheel classes, ASL learning zones, and exhibition spaces** that celebrate finished works as **expressions of identity and dialogue**. Through the integration of education, material exploration, and assistive technologies, Signs of Earth expands sensory engagement and deepens spatial awareness. Ultimately, Signs of Earth is a DeafSpace that **prioritizes accessibility, visual connectivity, and embodied communication**. By merging pottery and ASL, the project challenges conventional notions of language and interaction; **Positioning creativity and dexterity as shared grounds for connection, belonging, and mutual understanding**.



### EXTERIOR GATHERING AREA

- Welcomes all into a collaborative learning and gathering space.
- Clear pathways and flexible layout highlight ASL and art as key communication.
- Immersive, reflective environment with the use of technology.
- Natural elements tie the space to pottery's local resources.



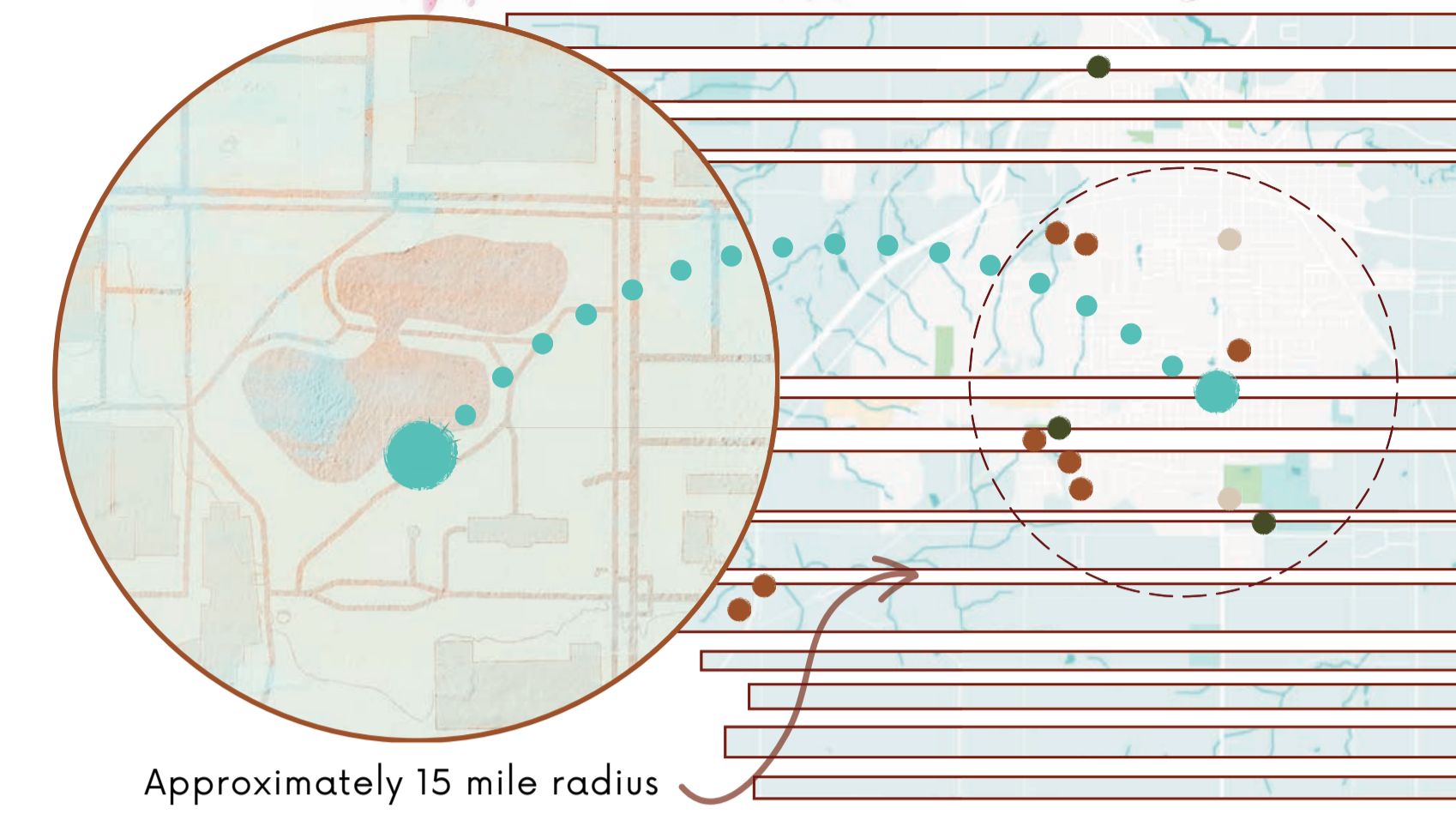
### POTTERY STUDIO

- Pottery builds dexterity and self-expression through hands.
- Clay offers a nonverbal way to communicate and tell stories.
- Strengthens community and creates lasting memories.
- Features include curved gallery shelves, kilns, and drying storage.



### EDUCATION FLEX SPACE

- Designed to bridge visual and verbal communication.
- Accessible with interpreters, supporting all levels of hearing ability.
- Educating about the Deaf community and gaps in society.
- Campus setting fosters learning and connection.
- Clay deposits tie to the area's rich pottery history.
- Emphasizes touch through soil, walls, light, and texture.



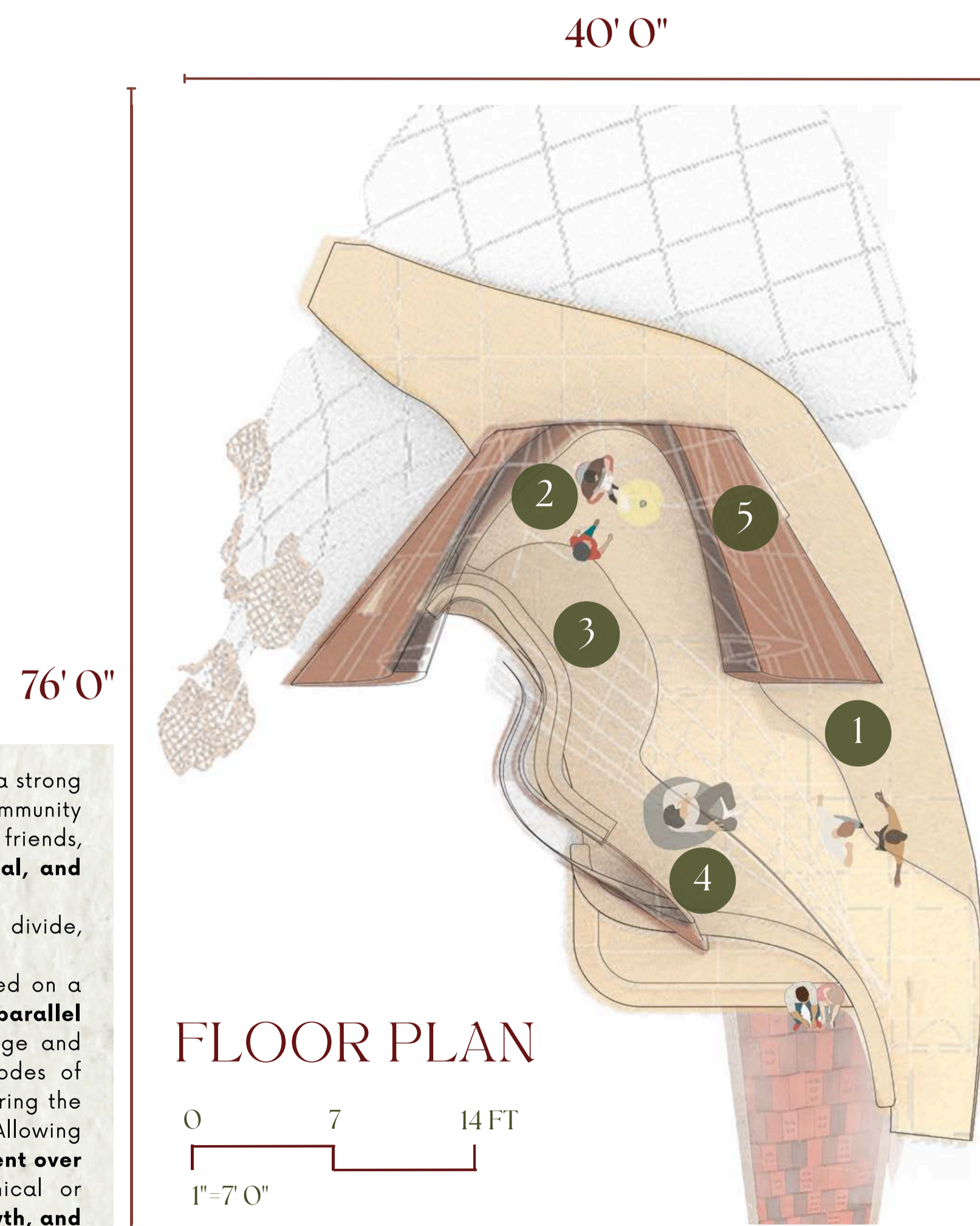
Approximately 15 mile radius

## SITE ANALYSIS

- TARGETED SITE
- SCHOOLS & UNIVERSITIES
- PARKS & BODIES OF WATER
- COMMUNITY CENTERS

## SITE & CONTEXT

- Large deaf communities in the small town and vicinity.
- College campus
- Strong ASL programs that attracts and has deaf learners and educators.
- Lacks spaces for advocacy for deaf community.
- Natural clay deposits
- Adjacent bodies of water

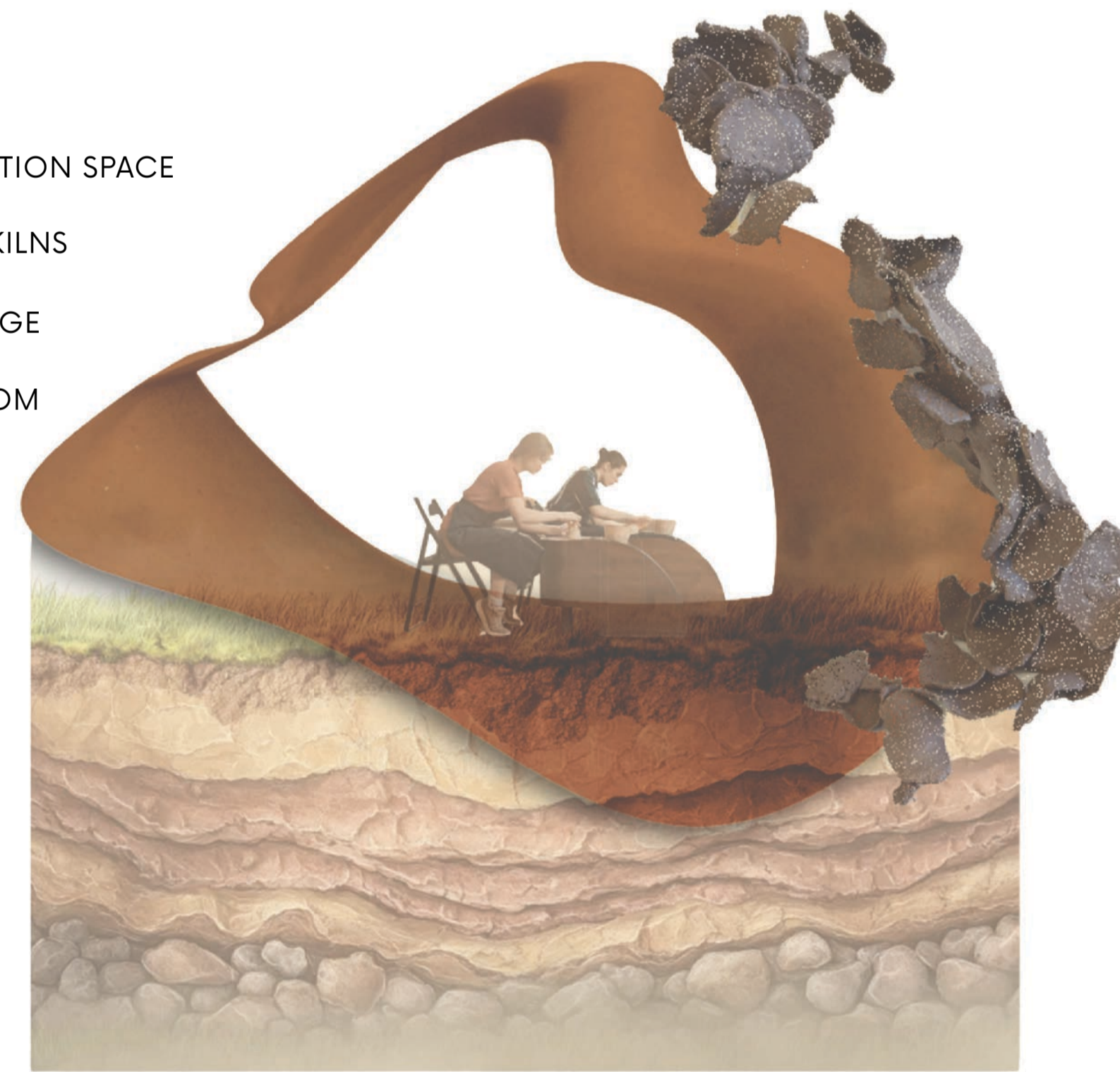


## FLOOR PLAN

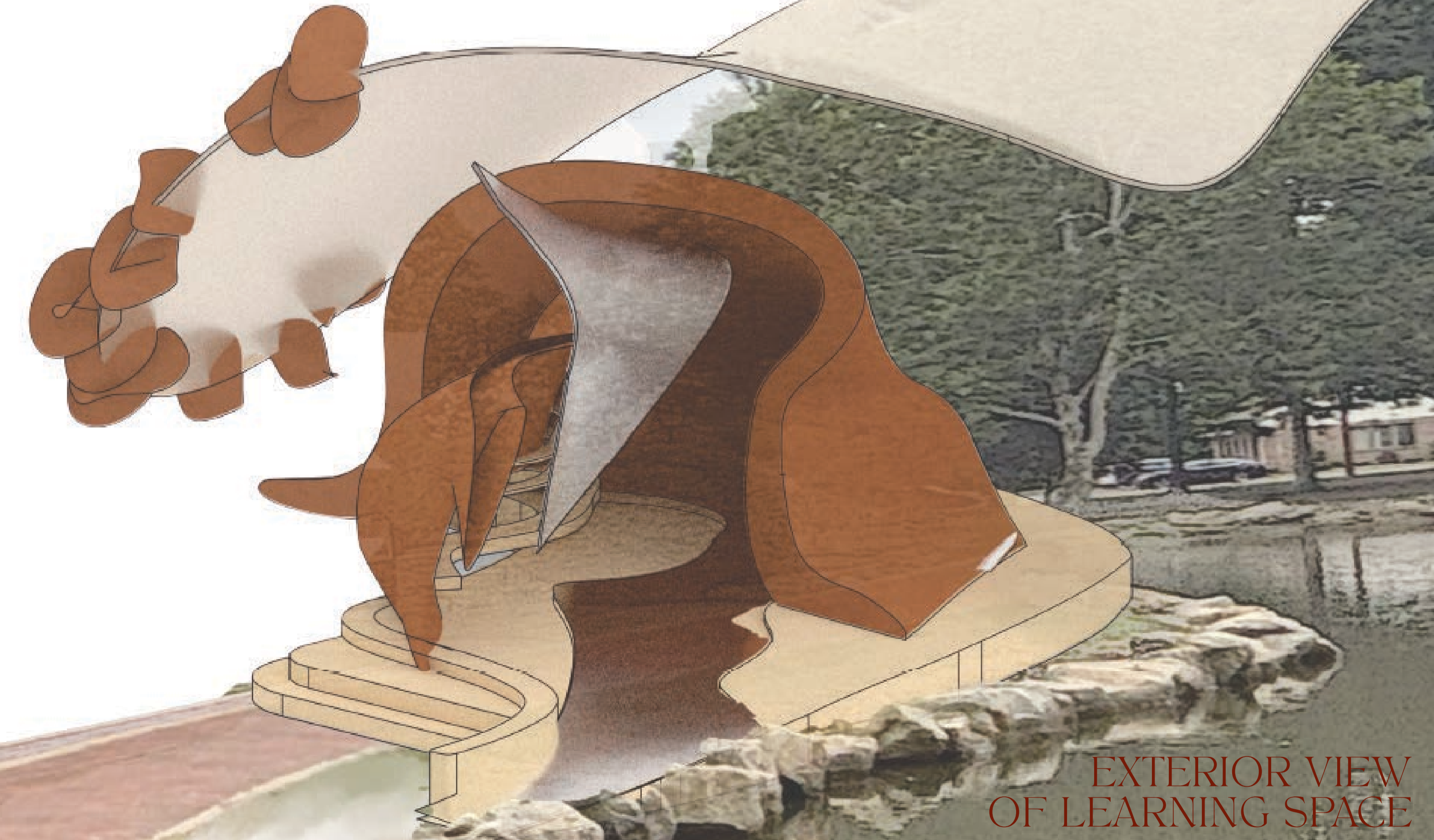
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## CONCEPT STATEMENT

Signs of Earth is a **DeafSpace** centered environment composed of man-made clay structures that support accessible art, communication, and community. The project fosters **visual learning, dexterity, and creative exchange** among young adults while engaging the surrounding campus community. Situated on a college campus and grounded in **Midwest clay deposits**, the design draws directly from its material and geographic context to **encourage interaction between people, place, and earth**. Bridging sign language and sculpture, the space emphasizes hand-based making as a shared mode of expression. With education and communication at its core, Signs of Earth promotes **inclusivity, sensory awareness, and meaningful connection** through the act of creating.



## CONCEPTUAL COLLAGE



## EXTERIOR VIEW OF LEARNING SPACE

## CITATIONS

- 1 DeafSpace - campus design and planning. Gallaudet University. (2025, May 8). <https://gallaudet.edu/campus-design-facilities/campus-design-and-planning/deafspace/>
- 2 Gensler Research Institute. (2024, February 1). *Fostering lifelong learning at universities in Latin America*. Gensler. <https://www.gensler.com/gri/lifelong-learning-at-universities-in-latin-america>
- 3 Hicks, S. S. (2022). *Interior design: Living in poverty and the absence of health, safety, and welfare*. Journal of Interior Design, 47(2), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joid.1221>
- 4 Thomas, D. J. (2013). *Not a hearing loss, a deaf gain: Power, self-naming, and the ...* Old Dominion University. [https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=efl\\_etds](https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=efl_etds)
- 5 Malone, T. W. (2018). *Superminds: The surprising power of people and computers thinking together*. Little, Brown and Company.
- 6 Savage, G. (2025, September 1). *Pottery*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/pottery>