Today was dedicated to working on our concept and creating a design philosophy for our retrofit project assignment. Due to some festivities the night before, many participants arrived quite a bit later than the anticipated start time of 9 AM. I was one of these students. While some of us were in fairly rough shape, the session managed to be quite productive and, of course, very interesting. One aspect of the GBS program that I find particularly fascinating is the international and interdisciplinary nature of participants and program activities. Many participants are very capable in applying technologies and best practices to building design, but, it seems as though getting at the underlying philosophy as to why we build what we build is the aspect that I can help contribute to the most. Prior to departing for Vienna, I wondered to myself just what it is that I can contribute to a group that will likely have much greater technical knowledge than I do. What I am learning is that not all projects are wholly technical in nature, that there needs to be a philosophical aspect as well. This is one of my strengths, I think – to be able to vividly imagine something in the future and speak as though it could be or is already real. Or, at least that is what type of role I am trying to adopt as a professional.

For any development to be successful, the idea must resonate with the community. Sometimes, this idea is to be 'sold' to the market. The resonance of these ideas are measured in number of units sold. In other cases, such as with our project, there is no product to be sold. So, what, then, are project teams to do? Why, exactly are we retrofitting this building? These are the fundamental questions that I think all teams should keep in mind – that there needs to be a clear and inspirational vision for what we need to do, why, and how we can do it. Images and renderings, accompanied by a well-articulated description, can help individuals truly identify in the development, to see themselves living and growing in the space and interacting in the surrounding area. Every building may appear at first to be an island, but, in reality it is just one component of a larger urban fabric. This fabric is constantly evolving, tearing, being repaired, being re-imagined…We must think of how our retrofit concept embraces this energy and channels it in a manner that is *different*. For passivehaus concepts to be successful, they require an approach that goes beyond demonstrating technical feasibility or sophistication. Passivehaus must become a symbol and philosophy for development that is focused on reorienting the occupant and the building itself to be better integrated into natural systems, providing a richer sense of place and occupant identity.

*Figure 1 - Evidence as to why so many students were late*