Many small plaques in remembrance of veterans scatter the walls and grounds of the Memorial Union. The abundance of commemoratives has value, of course, but Marty Walker, director of administrative services in the College of Engineering, thought that perhaps one large memorial would also be appropriate. “It was decided that we could sort of consolidate those memorials,” Walker told the Columbia Missourian.

And so a joint effort between the Faculty Council Student Affairs Committee and the Chancellor’s Committee for Veterans and Military Affairs began. To launch the project, Walker contacted assistant professor in architectural studies Newton D’Souza, who then arranged for his 4000-level architecture studio students to develop designs that included brick and mortar as well as digital memorials.

After studying the layout and traffic flow in Memorial Union, 14 students submitted designs for the new campus memorial, which honors past, present and future MU veterans. The proposals were presented to the Faculty Council Student Affairs Committee. Three finalists – seniors Karen Johnson, Molly Landers and Samantha Matthews – then presented their work to the Chancellor and his staff in February. Johnson’s design was chosen, and she will work with the administration and campus facilities to make the memorial a permanent part of Memorial Union.

“All three students understood the scope of the project in terms of implementation and feasibility,” D’Souza says. “Most of all, I feel their success can be attributed to how each designer communicated their design very effectively. When you work with real-world clients this is a critical factor.”

Because the students only had four weeks to come up with their initial designs, the finalists were able to fine-tune their work as they got further along in the selection process—which is important, because the new memorial will be a special, permanent place for remembrance and reflection. “It means a great deal to have students’ work displayed so prominently,” D’Souza says. “But it also comes with a great deal of responsibility; we need to make the projects work for the community.”

And perhaps most importantly, it shows students that their work can have a real-world impact. The project, according to D’Souza, gives them cause “to relish something that they did during school as students and is something tangible that they can be proud of and share with their family for a lifetime.”

Proposal 1: Karen Johnson’s missing column proposal was inspired by the “missing man formation” (when military pilots fly in standard formation but with an empty space for their missing colleague).

Proposal 2: With veterans’ names listed on the glass front, Molly Landers’ design echoes the reflective nature of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Proposal 3: Samantha Matthews’ design includes a touch screen and a black granite wall in an alcove in the Memorial Union (one of the walls in the entry would be moved).