



Landscaping

AN INTEGRAL PART OF CAMPUS DESIGN

by Sheila Wagner

When high school students and their parents are beginning the search for a university, the first impression upon arriving on campus can sometimes mean the difference between falling in love with the setting and being unimpressed with what they see. That is one reason why landscape architecture is such an important aspect in campus planning.





In "Recognizing Campus Landscapes as Learning Spaces" from the *Journal of Learning Spaces*, Kathleen G. Scholl and Bowri Betrabet Gulwadi note that people expect a university campus to express something about the quality of academic life there. Well-designed networks of open spaces on the campus can be key catalysts in student learning and a strong influence on a student's experiences that promote a sense of belonging to the learning community.

The Importance of Open Spaces

In *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, Siu Yu Lau et al. discuss landscape and architectural design strategies to offer open spaces for students to enjoy, spaces that satisfy any number of purposes. Open spaces between buildings as well as spaces dividing surrounding environments provide a sense of direction on the campus and help organize different areas. A large open space creates an area for planned and spontaneous activities in a natural setting, and it can be a relaxing atmosphere encouraging impromptu meetings and discussions and providing fresh air for stressed scholars.

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In “Healthy Campus by Open Space Design: Approaches and Guidelines,” Siu Yu Lau et al. examine landscape design strategies for alleviating stress on university campuses. Another factor to consider is incorporating a sustainable open space which can facilitate a highly effective resource for teaching about natural systems, biodiversity, and other ecological and natural science subjects.

For example, a landscape architect can help select native species which will thrive; for biodiversity, he will research bird species likely to use the space and select plants that will provide food and/or nesting areas. Open spaces from a bio-ecology perspective has a far-reaching implication for healthy campus life as well as providing habitat for vegetation and wildlife, creating a microclimate for users, and increasing stormwater infiltration for the soil.

Father of Landscape Architecture

Scholl and Gulwadi highlight Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), popularly known as the father of landscape architecture, who was an influential landscape designer of early campuses. He believed that the physical landscape features had a direct



Stanford University

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WPI Sports & Recreation Center is an environmentally friendly facility containing a 38-meter pool, a fitness center, a four-court gymnasium, an indoor running track, rowing tanks, racquetball and squash courts, dance studios, and offices and meeting spaces for the coaches and staff. The center is home to the wrestling team as well as the practice facility for men's and women's rowing and varsity team training.

Sustainability is important to WPI which boasts several LEED certified facilities on campus. The school has a broad reaching sustainability planning process which includes students as well as faculty. Faculty members have incorporated sustainability into many student projects and focused on various aspects of sustainability around the world. In 2012 alone, some fifty-one energy-related projects were completed at the school.



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Lau et al. suggest Harvard Yard is regarded as the most identifiable place on campus and a symbolic heart of the school. The canopied lawn keeps the hustle and bustle out by creating a peaceful ambience.

impact on shaping human behavior and offered students an active, experiential education versus passive or theoretical learning. Olmsted stated that “natural scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigorating to the whole system.”

Stanford Magazine explains that the first college campus Olmsted designed was for Stanford University in 1886. Leland Stanford, who wanted to fund a new university in memory of his son, had heard that Olmsted was the best landscape designer because he had designed Central Park in New York City, among other important projects. The two men were unsuited to be partners in this endeavor because Stanford had definite ideas about what a college campus

should be, which were diametrically opposed to Olmsted’s plan for the grounds.

While Olmsted’s original design was changed significantly, and the two parted ways in 1890, Sanford remains today as a combination of two very different visions.

Improved Landscape Design for City Campus

Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, transformed their campus in the center of the city by providing the 60,000 square foot Lubert Plaza where two above-ground parking garages once stood. The new plaza, built above a 215-space parking garage, was designed to accommodate academic events and ceremonies. The plaza is surrounded by 53 trees, which offer shade in the urban environment.

The plantings are irrigated with rainwater, air conditioner condensate, and potable water collected in an underground cistern.

This has improved the environmental as well as the social aspect of the University. The Landscape Performance Series by Landscape Architecture Foundation conducted a survey on the Thomas Jefferson University students to see what impact the improvements made on students’ perception of the new plaza. Survey respondents reported that they feel more positive after spending time in the plaza and that they feel more able to cope with the stress of student life.

Harvard University’s Pastoral Setting

Lau et al. suggest Harvard Yard is regarded as the most identifiable place on campus and a symbolic heart of the school. The canopied lawn keeps the hustle and bustle out by creating a peaceful ambience. It is an astonishing transition from the busy active square to the tranquil pastoral area. Trees in the yard soften the boundary between the courtyard and nearby buildings, which creates a countryside-like feeling.

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Lau et al. also note that Tanner Fountain at Harvard was a ground-breaking project, because it is the creation of a fountain without a basin. It is recognized as the first institutional project of “Landscape as Art” movement. It is a remarkable combination of natural and man-made rocks with more than 30 spray nozzles located in the center of the stone circles. Through three seasons of the year, a fine mist is emitted that hovers like a cloud above the stones. During the winter, the mist actually becomes steam resulting in a light foggy haze that covers the stones.

Modern-Day Landscaping

Today’s campuses must be spaces in which the learning environment encompasses more than technology upgrades, classroom additions, and its academic buildings. The entire campus, including the open spaces, should be perceived as a holistic learning space.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sheila Wagner has spent the last several years working as a professional editor and recently became the staff writer for *Private University Products and News*. Wagner can be reached at sheila@pupnmag.com.



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