Renewing the Campus Landscape

Affecting approximately half of the main campus area, the Campus Plan will further enhance, restore, and green the already verdant campus.

Princeton’s campus is renowned for the superb quality of its physical environment and the way that its landscape legacy supports and reflects the continued excellence of the institution. During the era in which Beatrix Farrand was the University’s consulting landscape architect and Ralph Adams Cram was the consulting architect, decisions were considered from both perspectives equally, and many of the University’s most cherished spaces resulted from a vigorous exchange between the two disciplines. When Princeton discontinued the tradition of a campus landscape architect in the 1960s, however, there was no longer an individual or organization charged with promoting a vision for the continuity of the overall campus landscape.

The plan will restore a strong voice for the campus landscape and reframe new development within an understanding of the campus and its boundaries. Given Princeton’s current diversity of building styles, scales, and programs, its ongoing commitment to architectural innovation; and the historic importance of its wooded setting, a planning process that prioritizes the continuity of the overall campus landscape.

LANDSCAPE OBJECTIVES

As the University continues to grow, there are many obstacles to the continuity of open spaces in an already strained relationship between the historic core and the newer campus periphery. Elements of historic campus landscape traditions need to be balanced with and woven into the practice of expanding a modern campus.

Four landscape principles provide the foundation for this complex undertaking:

- Invent within the traditional pattern of campus-making
- Translate topography into campus form
- Reassert the presence of the woodland threshold
- Anticipate the impact of increased land management and environmental pressures

In support of these objectives, the Campus Plan identifies strategic stand-alone landscape improvements, independent from building projects, each selected for its potential to connect new development and create value for the whole of the campus. Together with proposed architectural projects, the plan adopts a landscape-based approach to weaving disparate parts of campus, different scales of architecture, and different eras of construction into a cohesive campus with a consistently strong identity.

A COMPREHENSIVE LANDSCAPE PLAN

There is a high demand for quality open space at Princeton. Increasingly, University staff must dedicate much effort to accommodating requests to host activities on the campus greens, courtyards, and smaller campus spaces. Escalation in use exacerbates an already acknowledged demand for investment in the landscape.

This plan performs the traditional role of locating landscape areas for improvements, while also recognizing that the campus landscape is made of and relies on a collection of systems: stormwater, planting communities, programming, topography, and land management practices. Every new building, landscape, and infrastructure project at Princeton offers the opportunity to further integrate these systems into a fundamentally sustainable landscape network. The goal of this plan is to allow the function and experience of the landscape to improve as the use of the campus expands.

The Campus Plan recognizes the challenges of sustaining the overall experience of a campus that is now five times the size of its historic core.
INVENTING WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF CAMPUS-MAKING

The Core Campus landscape experience at Princeton is defined by light-filled courts with open corners, high canopy trees, and stone walks. As the University has grown, the main campus has expanded to cover five times the area of the historic campus, which results in a landscape that feels stretched at the edges. Simultaneously, an increased campus population has put substantial strains on all areas of the landscape, but most particularly the well-loved historic core. In order to strengthen the overall campus experience as well as safeguard the historic core, a degree of inventiveness within Princeton's traditional patterns of campus-building is required.

The north and south edges of campus have each developed a distinctive feel that is missing from the middle ground between the two. To the north, the historic campus alongside Nassau Street is structured primarily by buildings while to the south, the campus areas adjacent to Lake Carnegie are structured primarily by the woodland landscape. These two themes are reinforced by the placement of buildings and landscapes. Toward Nassau Street the buildings are of a similar size and create a confined space. These two themes are reinforced by the placement of buildings and landscapes alongside Nassau Street is structured primarily by buildings, developed a distinctive feel that is missing from the middle landscape, but most particularly the well-loved campus population has put substantial strains on all areas of the campus. Taken together, these athletic fields, parking lots, maintenance service areas, dumpsters, and infrastructure resulted in a “middle landscape” that offers, at least, a bland environment without any of the character present by the northern and southern campus types. It is the aspiration of the Campus Plan to diminish the conditions that characterize the middle landscape and to reinvigorate the rich juxtaposition of the two dominant landscape types on campus.

These recommendations suggest this juxtaposition as a way to reclaim a quality that has been largely absent from the Princeton landscape as it has expanded. This goal will establish a campus-wide framework around which several other needed improvements can be structured. These might include campus wayfinding, sustainable stormwater landscapes, ecological improvements to the campus woodland area, and the development of a new landscape language that can withstand contemporary levels of use and help mediate the escalation in building size and complexity that seems unavoidable as the campus continues to develop.

Through its implementation, the Campus Plan will also open up new potential for the Princeton campus landscape to be sensitive, sustainable, and beautiful while simultaneously inviting greater use and creating improved functional performance. For instance, in the redesign of Butler College, the need to create a below-grade dining facility presented the opportunity to establish a new social landscape at the heart of the residential college. Providing space for quiet study and small gatherings, Butler College Memorial Court is a contemporary expression of the tradition of small-scale courtyards epitomized by the 1903 Garden, the McCosh Infirmary, Chancellor Green Courtyard, and Pyne Terrace. Similar in spirit to Beatrix Farrand’s cisterns that collected water to facilitate plant growth, Farrand introduced the concept of “two-dimensional shrubs” espaliered against building walls to add color and texture to the primarily deciduous tree objects anchored by their relation to wooded areas. Located toward Lake Carnegie exist as semi-independent recreational areas, besieged by the campus open space, whereas buildings located toward Lake Carnegie exist as semi-independent objects anchored by their relation to wooded areas. These two different campus spaces exist harmoniously at Princeton, but the transition between these systems is problematic, especially as the two campus types have grown closer together.

During Beatrix Farrand’s tenure as the consulting landscape architect at Princeton, the two campus types were developed as clearly separate zones for academic and recreational activities. Several nature trails created by Farrand established a delicate network of circulation between these two environments. As the campus progressed and expanded, however, recreational spaces and higher levels of activity were developed at the boundaries of the northern portion of the campus. Taken together, these athletic fields, parking lots, maintenance service areas, dumpsters, and infrastructure resulted in a “middle landscape” that offers, at least, a bland environment without any of the character present by the northern and southern campus types. It is the aspiration of the Campus Plan to diminish the conditions that characterize the middle landscape and to reinvigorate the rich juxtaposition of the two dominant landscape types on campus.

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The ten-year landscape plan aims to increase the articulation of the campus in currently undefined areas, better marrying its building with its landscape context.

HISTORY OF CAMPUS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

1870-1875 Donald G. Mitchell, essayist, novelist, and farmer who had published a treatise on landscape gardening, was appointed to make plans for the improvement of the entire campus. Under the leadership of President McCosh, the character of the campus landscape became that of an “English gentleman’s park” – that is, open lawns dotted with trees laid out in an informal, not geometric, pattern. Mitchell is credited with the design of the grounds around the first Dickinson Hall, and with the remaking of a front campus 170 feet wide by 270 feet deep.

1906 The creation of Lake Carnegie in 1906, by the construction of a dam at the confluence of the Stony Brook and the Millstone River, marks the moment of greatest landscape change on the campus, transforming hundreds of acres of marshland into a 1.5-mile-long body of water.

1912-1943 Beatrix Farrand’s Farrand had the greatest influence on the unique character of the historic campus. Farrand clearly articulated the function of the campus landscape as a framework for development and its fundamental role in furthering the goals of a liberal education. She proposed a systematic approach to the campus landscape that would provide an understanding of circulation and views, emphasize the architectural qualities of the buildings, and provide beauty as essential part of the experience of a university. Farrand cleared the grounds of shrubs and low-growing hedges that would provide views and circulation. She introduced the concept of “two-dimensional shrubs” replacing building walls with two-dimensional architecture to the primarily deciduous tree palette, and carefully orchestrated the timing of the biophases to provide a sense of quarter harmony. All of this would become hallmarks of the Princeton landscape.

1943-1957 Alfred Gaffney, a prominent landscape architect of the great regionalists.

1958-1961 Stanley W. Hays, former Stevens Institute of Technology, known for his design of the Normandy American Cemetery “Orchard Beach” in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

1961-1973 Michael Rapoza, of the New York firm Clisham & Rapoza, nationally known for their work on public and private projects of great importance. He conducted the first comprehensive tree survey and report in 1964.

1974-1982 Robert L. Zion of the Zion and Zion, Green Ridge, New Jersey, was responsible for the design and construction of Firestone Place.

Early 1980s to 2000 From the early 1980s until 2000, there was a shift away from the Beatrix Farrand tradition. The consulting landscape architect being on-call, individual designers were hired in conjunction with each building project – in contrast to the architects of the buildings. These landscape architects have included:

- Louise Schiller (new stadium, many sites throughout the campus)
- Miro Rocki (Mitchell Shotta Architects)
- Carla Tiberi
- Michael Vergason (Shoppe Partners, and armadillo)
- Andropogon Associates (Frist Campus Center)
- Barbara Pace
- Sasaki Partnership (Forestal Campus)
- Henry Aarlo (tree study in late 1980s)

2000-2005 Quennell-Rothschild of New York was commissioned to undertake several improvement projects, including the renewal of McCosh Plaza, Einstein Hall, and the landscaping around the Audie Murphy Center for the Humanities.

2005-present Public garden designer Lynden B. Miller was hired to continue the Beatrix Farrand tradition. She has designed gardens for Wyman House, Meridian House, Lowrie House, and Prospect House.

2005-present Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates in the process of designing and designing the landscape—including its overall structure as well as specific spaces—which will knit the campus together as it evolves over the next ten years.

THE PLAN: CONNECTING THE CAMPUS

PRINCETON CAMPUS PLAN
TRANSLATE TOPOGRAPHY INTO CAMPUS FORM

The historic campus establishes open greens at the center of academic life by placing them on high, flat ground. As is often related, the early grounds at Princeton inspired the first use of the word campus, etymologically based on the Latin for “open field” or “expanse surrounded” in reference to the flat open terrain that separated Nassau Hall from Nassau Street.

As campus expansion increasingly encountered the topography of the land descending down to Lake Carnegie, however, the transitions between high ground and low ground became opportunities to develop a new relationship between architecture and landscape.

Throughout the history of campus expansion southward toward the lake, the University’s existing topography has been transformed into landscape spaces that guide circulation and orientation. The campus is organized by two basic types of circulation that are an intuitive outgrowth of the campus topography:

- North-south tributary paths that maneuver around buildings and incorporate steps and transitions in grade through shifts in geometry and elevation
- East-west walks that collect the smaller tributary paths that are characterized by their consistent elevation and straightened geometry

The Campus Plan seeks to extend and perhaps expand this approach to developing campus circulation through the encounter of the underlying topography. For instance, the new Butler Walk will establish a connection between the Ellipse and Wilcox Hall, reinforcing the importance of the spaces at each end, while also supporting the integration of the residential college into the campus as a whole. Framed on either side by the buildings of Butler College, the New Butler Walk will be lined with sprigged beech trees that are not used elsewhere on campus, reinforcing its processional aspects and giving the space a specific horticultural character. Inspired by campus paths adjacent to Nassau Hall, new bluestone pavements are introduced to meet the circulation needs of the growing population at the heart of campus. These are integrated into a system of new-generation rain-cistern technologies that serve the dual purpose of reducing runoff and allowing for stormwater reuse.

This manner of negotiating place and elevation within the campus is a valuable system that should remain; existing pathways extend from the campus core into new precincts. For instance, Shapiro Walk is being reconceived so that it might extend the strong landscape character of McCosh Walk across Washington Road all the way to the E-Quad. Similar to the role that Louie-Love Walk plays in the west, a new public corridor between Prospect Avenue and Ivy Lane improves north-south connections in the eastern precincts of campus. East-west circulation will also be strengthened through improvements to McCosh Walk and Goheen Walk, retrofitting these pathways to better withstand the stresses of contemporary use.

Topographic form and circulation

The Blair Archway offers the iconic example of this topographic planning tradition. At the time of its completion, it served as the arrival gateway for the original Dinky train line that stopped at the base of the archway steps. The translation of topography into campus landscape was expanded upon in this location with the moving of the train arrival point to the south. The new procession to the train, developed in collaboration between Beatirx Farrand and Ralph Adams Cram, carefully blends the rising hillside into the architecture and the landscape and absorbs the Blair Archway within the interior of the campus. The further extension of the processional walkway from Blair Archway past Fynne Hall to the Arts and Transit Neighborhood is one of several projects that further translate topography into campus form and increase a sense of connectivity across seemingly disparate parts of campus.

North-south pathways travel the sloped topography to the lake and maneuver around varied building sizes and styles.

East-west pathways provide level and straight terraces that form the major walks of the campus.
A new diagonal will reinforce two critical circulation networks for the expanded campus.

Extend the diagonal

As the campus grew, this system of east-west walks and north-south pathways was not enough to fully connect the campus. Over time, diagonal pathways developed that linked the historic upper campus with areas of growth. Diagonals achieved an effortless continuity of the campus landscape and alleviated a significant elevational obstacle. One key diagonal path passes a series of buildings and landscapes from Alexander Hall to the Frist Campus Center. Increasing the role of this corridor will be an essential component in integrating the expanded lower campus into existing walkways.

In effect, this plan proposes to clear the way for a pedestrian path of least resistance that links the Core Campus and campus lands to the east. Currently the diagonal path ends abruptly at McCosh Health Center and offers only a tenuous link to the Frist Campus Center. The terminus of the diagonal in the area bounded by Frist, McCosh Health Center, and Gyour is at the same elevation as Washington Road, and thus presents the best opportunity to establish effective physical and programmatic connections between the Core Campus and areas to the east. The ease of the diagonal passage extended to this area would provide a link to another collector of pedestrian traffic occurring in the areas around Ivy Lane.

The new diagonal

The campus lands east of Washington Road and south of Prospect Street are isolated from adjacent areas of campus by virtue of the roads themselves and the kind of architecture they support. As a result, this area has not yet achieved cohesiveness with the image and tradition of Princeton. Instead of supporting the outdoor social interactions and activities that characterize successful areas of campus, its open spaces are generally residual and often oriented toward vehicles and service uses.

In the Core Campus the architecture frames the campus green spaces. By contrast, the eastern part of campus has a collection of large structures floating within undistinguished open spaces that aren’t experienced as a continuous campus landscape extending between buildings. Given that Princeton’s commitment to research will perpetuate the need for large and programmatically complex buildings, issues of scale will likely be ongoing for this area.

The development of the eastern campus landscape is further complicated by the fact that the Princeton Stadium complex occupies its geographical center. The mass and location of the stadium allow few opportunities to cross this area.

The proposed Sciences Green

The largest unprogrammed and underutilized space on campus is the perimeter of the stadium. Through improved circulation and a complete transformation of its landscape, the stadium’s western edge presents a significant opportunity for the creation of a single unifying Sciences Green at the heart of the Natural Sciences Neighborhood. The plan proposes a redesign of the space and its roadways, lawns, walks, and trees. With a continuous open greensward, realigned service roadways, and walks at the perimeter, the Sciences Green will create a usable and attractive campus open space that integrates the buildings in this part of campus with open vistas to the north and south. This new greensward also has the potential to be extended north of Ivy Lane as that area develops in the future.

Existing buildings and varying land uses present several challenges to providing connections to the east edge of campus.

The proposed Sciences Green landscape design will unify circulation and campus character, and serve as a framework for future development, tying the new with the existing.
RE-ASSERT THE PRESENCE OF THE WOODLAND THRESHOLD

The wooded edge along Lake Carnegie and the remnant woodlands that follow the several tributary streams are important fragments of a complex ecological system. As the campus has grown, increases in the amount of stormwater being directed to the tributaries and the removal of woodland area has continued to put pressure on this already fragile ecology. In the interest of improving the campus environment, the campus woodlands are recognized in the plan as a valuable campus asset that needs to be protected, and in some cases restored.

This original woodland can still be partially seen as one uses the Washington Road and Elm Drive entrances to the University. The woodland that frames these entrances has become a familiar identifier of the Princeton precinct, as most visitors to Princeton now approach from Route 1. This remaining natural landscape creates a moment of arrival at Princeton (town and university) by establishing a clear separation from the suburban/highways. Despite the diminished size of the overall woodlands, the concentration of the woodland mass along these entrances provides a strong counterpoint to the refinement of the inner campus landscape.

Ecological health is sometimes a matter of establishing enough area to have a true woodland center, not just a series of edges. The breaks in the woodland area that have been created in the last few decades of development, have limited the continuity of the woodland canopy. Each significant break in this woodland mass creates more edge conditions which, as smaller fragments, lose stability as a woodland system and become exponentially more vulnerable to invasive plant species and establish edge vulnerabilities like invasive plant species and establish edge vulnerabilities like invasive plant species and establish exponential greater opportunities for habitat. Building upon these woodland zones in overall size, complexity, and function is a priority of this plan. At every opportunity, Princeton should seek to construct woodland buffer areas.

At each of these buffers the planting can be designed to establish a density both of trees and ground plane plantings to help resist the influx of invasive species at the edge. These protective zones at the edge of woodlands are prime opportunities to create landscapes that absorb stormwater loads generated by the new projects. As has been recognized by employing this strategy in the design of the new Chemistry building, it is far easier to build these stormwater treatment landscapes as part of the construction of a major capital project than to wait until after a building and its associated site improvements are completed.

Buffer landscapes

As part of the overall strategy of increasing the size and presence of the woodlands, the Campus Plan proposes new woodland plantings along Washington Road and Elm Drive. These buffers will create new recreational opportunities through nature paths, restoring the experience of Farrand’s path systems and informally linking the University to recreational activities. From an ecological perspective, the proposed new woodland areas will act primarily as protection for the original fragments of native woodland. They will provide an important first line of defense against edge vulnerabilities like invasive plant species and establish exponential greater opportunities for habitat. Building upon these woodland zones in overall size, complexity, and function is a priority of this plan. At every opportunity, Princeton should seek to construct woodland buffer areas.

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PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

1. Reinforced woodland along existing stream
2. Understory woodland grasses
3. Inviting approach to the Ellipse
4. Pedestrian path connecting to Roberts Stadium
5. Constructed woodland planting
The Plan: Connecting the Campus

From a sustainable landscapes perspective, the ideal campus would consume no outside resources, present no hazard to adjoining natural systems, require no maintenance, and produce no waste. Although it is unlikely Princeton can ever achieve this goal, there is interest in seeking new ways to move closer to it. A major initiative of the Campus Plan has been to integrate the principles of sustainability into all aspects of the design, construction, and maintenance of the landscape. By striving to do better than just what is required by regulation, Princeton can become a national leader in sustainable landscape practices.

In her work at Princeton, Beatris Farrand acknowledged the challenges and rewards of working with a “living institution,” in that each project she built at Princeton added another dimension to an already complex relationship between the operations of the campus and the built and natural environments. Farrand pioneered an approach to the efficient care and management of the campus environment, particularly by treating the basic mediums of landscape architecture—planting, soils, paving, and rainwater—not as individual issues but as components in a self-sustaining and integrated system. Although many of her techniques have become outdated and inefficient by today’s standards, the idea that a modern, evolving institution should take this on as a challenge persists. With a campus already significantly larger than during Farrand’s tenure and facing further growth, land management and sustainable development are more critical than ever, and the need to translate the spirit and intent of Farrand’s work into modern techniques could not be more relevant.

Individually, each element of the landscape plays an important role in the development of the campus. Planting is one of the more visible manifestations of the campus ecology. Likewise, paving has a huge impact on the functioning of the landscape, and is also very much tied into the legibility of the campus as a unified whole. The plan supports the idea that there should be a multiplicity of paving systems on campus. Even if it were possible to standardize elements in an economical and attractive fashion, the extent of campus growth has led to divergent styles of architecture, as one moves away from the historic core. This diversity in the study of the performance and interaction of those basic mediums. The Campus Plan proposes both big and small measures that will contribute to make Princeton a leader in this approach. Taken together, these efforts will result in a campus that reduces its groundwater; sustains healthy plants that, in turn, require less maintenance; and reduces stress on the regional ecology and performance of the tributary streams into which most of Princeton’s stormwater runoff is released.

Princeton has always valued the overall quality of its campus landscape. Particularly during the period of rapid growth that characterized the Farrand years, the excellence of the campus environment, as expressed in its planning, design, construction, and maintenance, was very much a priority of university policy. A robustly beautiful and functionally sustainable landscape continues to be the ideal vehicle through which meaningful connections can be made between Princeton’s history of landscape excellence and its ongoing expansion as a modern campus.

Lynden B. Miller
Garden Design Consultant to Princeton University

Beatris Farrand, one of America’s finest landscape designers, worked on the Princeton campus from 1915 to 1941. Her deep understanding of plants and decades-long implementation of enhancements to the campus landscape have had a lasting impact on the beauty of this special place. Her legacy has endured thanks to the passing on of her design ideas from one University grounds manager to another over the years. That many of Mrs. Farrand’s wonderful plants can still be found across the campus is also a testament to her understanding of what we now call the sustainable landscape. She added many fine varieties of trees and shrubs to the campus with an emphasis on those native to the Princeton area and of interest during the school year. Her work can best be seen in many of the beautiful trees, shrubs, and climbing plants that are still thriving at the Graduate College and Wyman House.

Beatris Farrand believed that the beauty of the campus added to the mental growth and well-being of students. Generations of Princetonians have been devoted to their landscape. Because the campus is now used and enjoyed 12 months of the year, it is important to have plans for all four seasons. Expanding on a plan begun by Mrs. Farrand, we designed a garden within the walled upper garden adjacent to Wyman House. In the shade of massive elm trees, we designed gardens around Maclean House, home of 10 Princeton presidents and now occupied by the Alumni Association. Inspired by Mrs. Farrand’s dazzling displays at the Rockefeller Garden in Seal Harbor, Maine, which are still being maintained, we have added winter structure and many new plants to the Prospect House gardens and will continue to refine this garden in the future.

Working with the University’s landscape team, we are designing new gardens and adding the very best plants around the campus. It is a great honor to be following in the tradition of Beatris Farrand by continuing to enrich the Princeton landscape experience for students, staff, and visitors.

ANTICIPATE THE IMPACT OF INCREASED LAND MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

The need to anticipate the impact of increased land management and environmental pressures is ever more crucial in the development of the campus. The study of the performance and interaction of those basic mediums. The Campus Plan proposes both big and small measures that will contribute to make Princeton a leader in this approach. Taken together, these efforts will result in a campus that reduces its groundwater; sustains healthy plants that, in turn, require less maintenance; and reduces stress on the regional ecology and performance of the tributary streams into which most of Princeton’s stormwater runoff is released.

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