

Creating Meaningful Spaces



Many people have a certain place they consider special. A Victorian-styled gazebo where their spouse proposed. A lush, green park where they shared an ice cream cone with a friend. A wooden bench where they go to relax. While the reasons may vary, the similarity is the meaningful connection people feel to the place itself.

What if there was a major where university students learned to create meaningful spaces? At Texas Tech University, the landscape architecture program prepares students to imagine, design and create spaces that incorporate both the land and the people who use it.

“It’s basically the design of outdoor spaces, anything outside the building” said Charles Klein, Ph.D., an associate professor at Texas Tech University and interim department chair for the Department of Landscape Architecture. “It could be the gardens, and certainly plants and planting design are one of the things that separate us from the other design professions.”

Klein got involved in landscape architecture after growing up with, and later running, his father’s landscaping business. After earning his



master’s degree and working several years as an architecture consultant, he now finds his home at Texas Tech where he mentors landscape architecture students and assists them with their projects.

While the landscape architecture department is smaller than most with only 85 students, the spirit of the amateur architects is strong. Klein said the students who pursue a career in landscape architecture have distinctive characteristics that make them unique from other students.

“The creative nature sets the landscape architecture students apart,” Klein said. “The students enjoy thinking of creative ideas, and making those ideas work.”

Every architect hopes to see their project come to fruition, and once it does, to see it being used and appreciated. Klein said he was leading a study abroad trip in Mexico when he personally witnessed an architect experience this state of satisfaction. Klein was being escorted through the city by a renowned landscape architect, Mario Schjetnan, who had recently, upon request of the city, designed a national award-winning park which embodied the rich history of Mexico and its residents.

“We were walking up the pathway to the park and suddenly he goes, ‘look at that!’ We all startled and jumped. He’s pointing over to a hill and there is a family laying out a blanket, having a picnic under the trees overlooking the lake. Mario said ‘That is just what we had in mind when we planned the park!’” Klein said, chuckling. “Here is an internationally renowned

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architect and he's getting excited about a family having a picnic in a park that he created. “

Similar to Mario, students at Texas Tech are getting the opportunity to see their ideas become a reality.

Miranda Cochran, a senior landscape architecture major from Riviera, Texas, said she is excited at the limitless opportunities she has at her fingertips as a landscape architect.

“Landscape architecture is such a broad field, we can literally do anything we want,” Cochran said. “We can do high-end residential, parks, city planning, aquariums, greenbelts, new communities, zoos, resorts... anything.”

However, these projects are not designed and created overnight. Many projects require the architects to conduct intensive research and make logistical considerations. Some projects, Klein said, can take several years to complete.

So, how do the students begin designing the meaningful spaces we visit and hold dear to our hearts? Cochran said when she begins her designing process, she keeps the users and their needs in the fore front of her mind.

“I begin the design process by doing an inventory and analysis,” Cochran said. “I locate everything that's on the site, and then I analyze it by determining what will stay, and what needs to go.”

Cochran said she continues her process by analyzing the client's needs and wants in order to decide if they can be feasibly met within the work site. Cochran said during her designing process she asks herself two important questions: if her idea is aesthetically pleasing and if it will function properly within the space allotted.

While there is a great deal of logistical knowledge that must be applied when manipulating the landscape, landscape architecture students take into consideration much more when designing a project. Cochran said what she loves most about designing is that she is able to create private and public spaces which are capable of invoking emotions from those who use them.

“Every space we design should invoke some sort of feeling from the user,” Cochran said, “whether it is peace, tranquility, happiness, sadness, reflection or thoughtfulness. Whatever feeling is appropriate for the site.”

Perhaps the reason these locations provoke such strong emotion within its users is because of the passion architects instill into their designs. Chelsea Lemons, a senior landscape architecture major from Lubbock, Texas, shared the reason why she is personally invested in her projects.

“I love being outside,” Lemons said, her leather-bound portfolio resting in her lap. “And I love that I have the

ability to create amazing outdoor spaces that will make others want to enjoy the outdoors as well.”


In Lubbock, Texas, residents can visit locations that are the product of Texas Tech's very own landscape architects. The National Ranching Heritage Center, which is located on 4th Street and Indiana, is currently under construction and will soon replicate the blueprints that Cochran and her partner, Reagan Morkovsky, a senior landscape architecture major, designed two years ago. Cochran said when she and Morkovsky began redesigning the center as a class assignment, they had no idea how far this project would take them.

“The National Ranching Heritage Center wanted to redesign the park, and they were going to use different aspects from each student's design,” Cochran said, standing with Morkovsky next to one of the bronze bulls in front of the center. “However, when it was all said and done, they liked our design so much that they chose it to be built.”

The students of landscape architecture are, like most students, proud of their work, but ultimately, they pursue their passion for the sake of other people's happiness. Lemons elaborated on why she attempts to create effective, well-designed areas.

“I believe landscape architecture is certainly about creating meaningful spaces,” Lemons said. “But I would add ‘for people’. We can't forget the people we are designing the spaces for.”

Experienced architects, such as Klein and Schjetnan, and upcoming architects, such as Cochran and Morkovsky, will continue to create and design with ambition in order to continue reaching milestones and pushing their creative boundaries. Cochran, like Schjetnan, said she has already accomplished one of her dreams, and it is thanks to her time being a landscape architecture student.

“One of my dreams was to design a park, and how lucky am I to have been able to do that at my favorite place, at only 20 years old?” Cochran said. “It is one of my biggest accomplishments. I am honored and overjoyed for that opportunity.” 



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