

Campus Beautification

BY LARRY W. BOUGHMAN

Campus beautification can be traced to the very beginnings of formal education. Although not every institution considers it an important part of the total plan, landscape design has proved itself to be of extreme value to learning experience.¹

Right after the Garden of Eden, beautiful settings were not made but discovered—a clearing in the forest, a valley enclosed by mountains, or an island surrounded by blue and green water. In the

oldest available accounts, such spots were natural, and no work was needed to maintain them. The names of these settings usually indicated their location: grove, paradise, park, garden, wilderness, and meadow. When humans found such places, they felt different because of the atmosphere surrounding them. Many chose to live in such areas because of their natural beauty.²

Given this natural bent of most of humankind, it is not surprising as they developed schools and universities, they have become aware of the value of surrounding these places of learning with beauty. Unfortunately, however, that awareness has not

existed in every educational leader nor has it been reflected in the campus design of every institution.

For many years the material things of education, both inside and outside, received very little attention. Educators saw the setting as incidental to the learning process. To the ancient Greeks, the school was wherever the teacher and pupil happened to be. Oftentimes that was out of doors, with no school buildings at all.³

Ancient Beauty Spots

The original meaning of the word *academies* refers to the grove of trees planted

Picture
Removed

in honor of Academus in fourth-century-B.C. Greece. Here Plato and Socrates, sheltered from the relentless Greek sun, met in the shade of an olive tree with other inquisitive minds to discuss the nature of existence.⁴

History notes that when the Romans arrived in Britain, they remarked on the groves used by the Druids for study. Outside the walls of Athens are the groves of the Academy (an enclosure scattered with tombs and monuments)—one of the earliest places of study. The natural, untended quality of the grove reappears throughout the centuries and seemed to mark the landscape as the natural side of art.⁵

Medieval Development

Gardens, or landscaping within the context of the academic setting of medieval times, first appeared at Oxford and

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Cambridge, where gardens and special landscaped areas were included within the campus quadrangle.

During the medieval period, the quadrangle evolved into the English collegiate campus. This period saw the development of a community of specialized buildings for living, learning, and worshipping. The buildings were enclosed in a common courtyard known as courts.⁶

Batey, commenting on the gardens of Oxford and Cambridge, pointed out that they provided the necessary inspiration for developing the intellect.⁷ She found records promoting the gardens as necessary to foster excellence of training. Professors and students spent long hours sitting in the gardens contemplating the things at hand. The gardens were considered a source of inspiration and as an integral part of the philosophy of simplicity and excellence—for

students as well as professors. Batey asserts that the gardens were more essential to the colleges than were good professors.

The 18th Century

Except for Oxford and Cambridge, however, few colleges in England had any real concept of campus beautification. Lancelot Brown (1716-1783) developed the capability concept. He maintained that each site had capabilities. He sought in his mind to develop them for each particular site. Through simple, open design, Brown tried to develop the spirit or sense of each place. For this reason, he became known as the great landscape artist of his day.⁸

The Jeffersonian Concept

Thomas Jefferson pioneered a new type of school rooted in a humanist conception of society. By background and vocation a countryman, Jefferson expressed throughout his life a strong aversion to the city and a preference for a rural way of living. Jefferson believed that those who worked in the earth were chosen people of God. Wherever Jefferson went, he tried to make his surroundings more beautiful.⁹

Acting as both educator and architect, Jefferson brought a new kind of school into being. He called it his Academical Village. He sought to remove the school from the bustle, temptations, and conflicts of the city. When Jefferson founded the University of Virginia in 1817, he located it a mile outside the small village of Charlottesville.

A New Awareness of Landscaping

By the 19th century, landscape design began to turn away from developing the natural capabilities of the site, and started to add artificial elements. Humphry Repton (1752-1818) introduced such items as fountains, greenhouses, flower beds, terraces, or drives to soften the natural designs typical of the 17th century. By the late 19th century, some campus designers incorporated design concepts when planning a new campus, but for the most part, the idea of campus beautification was new and used by only a few institutions.

In his 1941 study, Lohmann¹⁰ depicted schools as symbols of intelligence, culture, and wholesome recreational activity in the community, and held that their surroundings should measure up to this unique position. For the sake of each student who

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spends thousands of impressionable hours in the campus setting, the grounds should be designed for maximum suitability, utilization, economy, and beauty.

Creating a Sense of Place

Distinctive landscapes help create a sense of place. Different types of trees and a variety of ground cover proclaim regional differences. Campuses are usually pedestrian precincts, and should provide special opportunities for their inhabitants to experience the intertwining of architecture and landscape for aesthetic enjoyment.¹¹

With this background information in mind, the following guidelines have been developed to help administrators and educators plan and develop a beautiful campus to enhance the learning experience.

CAMPUS BEAUTIFICATION GUIDELINES

The Design Concept

A beautiful campus cannot become a reality until the administration of a school realizes its importance and far-reaching implications. Thus the design concept must be given first priority. The administrator, usually the academy principal or college president, should provide a vision of what can be done to improve the appearance of the campus. This concept (or vision) should encompass all aspects of campus design. Therefore, the administrator should seek input from the staff, faculty, grounds personnel, students, and people in the community to gain their support and help in implementation.

The campus design should reflect the ideals of Seventh-day Adventism and present a statement to the public about the educational facility. This concept should be developed as part of a master plan in consultation with landscape architects, stressing a simple, functional landscape design

in harmony with Adventist life-style.

The Environment

According to Webster,¹² *environment* is defined as everything around one that influences the life of an individual or community. The environment should enhance the scholastic atmosphere of the school. It should also foster pride, morale, and peace, as well as a sense of spiritual renewal for the students, faculty, and community. This can be done by providing beautiful flowers, trees, and shrubs. It can also include well-planned pathways laid out in an informal arrangement with flowers planted alongside. It might also include special areas, such as quiet meditation and prayer gardens, or small streams, ponds, or fountains. Lighting effects can be used to draw attention to a certain building or garden. Environment can be controlled by developing a sense of place and creating a mood-enhancing atmosphere.

The Aesthetics

Aesthetics is concerned with beauty and the way it is utilized. Pleasing aesthetics gives a sense of self-respect and admiration for the school and its surroundings. It means that the grounds blend pleasantly with the building style and architecture. When the surroundings are aesthetically pleasing, the faculty and students have a sense of inspiration, appreciation, and well being. Creative use of lighting can develop campus aesthetics, as well as provide a safer environment.

Aesthetics results from doing a little extra to a certain place to make it special. For a prayer garden to be aesthetically pleasing, the designer must do more than designate a certain place. The garden can be made special by adding lighting, water, soft religious music, or kneeling benches.

The Framework

The framework is the structure that gives support to the various aspects of campus beautification as outlined in the master plan. A landscape architect can help develop this framework, which might include such items as landscaping, plantings, drainage, signs, roads, natural areas, and the distribution of utilities. The framework should focus on *entrance areas* to produce a positive first impression and on *community-use areas* to promote positive attitudes to-

ward the institution. It would be foolish to attempt campus beautification without a design. A master plan should be developed to provide stability to the project. Otherwise, the results may not be what was desired. The master plan can also define stages for the development as well as a schedule for implementation.

The Landscaping

Landscaping is the improvement of the landform. It is a vital element of campus beautification since it provides an opportunity to develop the various aspects of the master plan in keeping with the design concept. It is the means of developing a natural, clean, and well-maintained atmosphere. The landscaping should provide physical beauty, special locations for meditation, flower gardens, streams or fountains, walks, paths, or trails, and recreation areas. Its components should merge with the natural landscape.

Lighting is an important aspect of the landscape. Placing lights in strategic locations and planting shrubbery that do not provide hiding places make the campus safer. The expertise of a landscape architect can help administrators explore a variety of ideas and possibilities.

The Responsibility

Responsibility for the promotion of campus beautification ultimately falls on the administrators, for it is their task to develop the campus to its full potential. In recent years, this has become a major concern because of the influence of campus beautification on enrollment and on the quality of students who attend the institution.

This responsibility is shared by the board of trustees, other administrators, the faculty, staff, students, grounds personnel, and community. A campus beautification committee with representatives from these groups can advise and guide the administrators for campus beautification.

The Maintenance

All of the planning, committee work, policies, and master plans will mean little if the grounds are not properly maintained. Maintenance is a major problem because of the expense of hiring workers to keep the campus looking at its best. Low-maintenance plants and shrubs should be used.

Underground watering systems (though costly initially) are less expensive in the long run. A regular maintenance schedule can save time and guarantee the health of the plants and trees.

Students and faculty can choose certain areas of the campus for which they will be responsible. This will give them great satisfaction as they work outdoors and contribute to the beauty of the campus. Some students can work on the grounds to help offset their school expenses. If at all possible, an endowment fund should be set aside to maintain the grounds.

Additional Notes on the Guidelines

The location of the school influences campus beautification. The guidelines presented here are designed for the traditional Adventist campus located in the country with an abundance of land. A hilly or mountainous campus will require a different approach to campus beautification than a campus built on a plain. The climate will affect the choice of landscaping considered because of temperature and precipitation extremes. Some trees and plants will survive cold weather and plant diseases better than others. The location of the school is also important. The design can be more open if the school is located in the country than in a city or urban setting.

These guidelines may be modified for other parts of the world field. For the most part, schools in North America have mild to severe winters. In other parts of the world, the climate may be warm year-round. This would, of course, affect the growing season and the type of plants used on the campus. The annual rainfall will also be a factor in some areas.

Certain challenges facing Adventist educational institutions in regard to campus beautification may require a change in philosophy. In the past, when budget cuts were made, they often fell disproportionately on campus maintenance.

Enrollment and quality of students may be affected by the appearance of the campus. In a study conducted by the Carnegie Foundation,¹³ one thousand students were asked why they chose a particular school. Sixty-two percent stated that they chose the school because of its appearance. Thus, campus beautification can be an important factor in attracting students.

On existing campuses, changes can be

made gradually by replacing trees, shrubs, flowers, walks, lawns, lighting, and other elements of campus beautification to produce the desired effect.

While the ideal may not be achieved on every campus, the master plan can be used as a guideline for developing the campus as funds become available. These guidelines should be used by building committees and education facilities planning committees in developing educational specifications. Modifications and additions can be incorporated as needed.

Our schools should be the most beautiful and the best maintained. With a little planning and effort, we can provide for our students the best environment for learning and worship. ✍

Dr. Larry Boughman is an Assistant Professor of Education in the School of Graduate Studies at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, as well as Assistant Director of Education for the Far Eastern Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Singapore. He has taught elementary school in the United States and the Philippines, and earned a doctorate from Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1991. His dissertation dealt with the subject of this article, campus beautification.

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