

University of Southern California School of Architecture

**Core Studio: Landscape Architecture Concept Field Studies and Practices**

Landscape Architecture 542a, 6 units

Fall 2014 Semester

Location Watt Hall (WAH), 3rd Floor, Landscape Studios  
University of Southern California

Time Monday / Wednesday / Friday  
2PM-5:50PM

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**Introduction**

While landscape architects show displeasure that their professional name has anything to do with architecture, as if we neither have much to do with that profession, nor respect it, or chafe at its frequent indifference to ours, the association can also serve as a means to highlight the exceptional qualities of practicing landscape architecture. In his article “Landscape as Architecture” Charles Waldheim traces the history of the term, noting various complaints by important personalities, the professional bootstrapping, and lack of viable alternatives, but vis a vie the title, proposes that the term positions the profession as a structured part of (and not in opposition) the constructions of the city – united with architecture and infrastructure “to remediate the social, environmental, and cultural conditions of the contemporary city” rather than provide an antidote to “ills” of urbanism.

Originally applied to clarify prominence more than content for a nascent profession architecture in landscape architecture, by Waldheim’s account, now references its thoughtful and purposeful structuring. It is a composition of landscape materials and space driven less by the affectations of garden pleasures than the meaningful ordering of the urban condition in ways that landscape is well suited for. However, the kind of cognizance of intention and spatial form implied by this approach is more easily practiced within the relatively contained world of architecture design. Landscape, while it can be nearly confined within an ordering resembling architecture, defies the spatial simplicity and control of typical architecture constructions. It lies outside; it evolves over time; it’s spatial compositions are highly porous and complex; program is flexible or even non-stated; it is defined by weather events; it is highly interconnected; it is associated with “nature” and complex social constructs.

Yet, the idea of practicing a more specific and intentional landscape architecture cannot be dismissed and challenges us to understand the specific eccentricities and systems that define a landscape space, both in relation to architecture approaches and not, however it is useful. For example, the idea of defining a space without using architectural walls, but with landscape materials, living and not, is a useful consideration, even if it is largely an open space and porous space. A landscape architect should understand how trees, hedges, walls, and borrowed views define a place, while also reckoning their particular needs and performance on multiple levels.

To achieve an effective ordering or such an unruly medium, landscape architects have taken multiple approaches. Some focus on the ability of the profession as function as a problem solver, a curative fix to social and environmental health issues, which it undoubtedly

is. Others see the profession as an artistic endeavor that aspires to “higher” pleasures or aesthetic desires, a need demonstrated by our enduring attraction to landscape or “natural” experiences and our tendency to “green” things. Great landscape architecture find high levels of accomplishment within all of this, melding them into a well-balanced, layered, and often clearly hierarchical composition.

In these works we find a form and place, a construct of landscape materials that operates at multiple levels simultaneously – where a legibility of experiential place is defined through the operationally sound composition of landscape systems. Complexity of experience is manifested in an ever-evolving gradient that can only be assessed over years of engagement. Likewise, these places can be described by a negotiated layering of concepts and ideas that have guided the architecture of the landscape to produce certain effects and performances. Such a layering of concepts allows for the inherent unruliness of landscape, while enforcing a layering of determinable outcomes.

However, within the city many landscapes appear to only intend to carefully serve basic functional concepts, such as easy maintenance, safe access, or storm water treatment or conveyance, while presuming that any additional “higher” or experiential aspirations are automatically provided by its fuzzy facsimile of “nature”. The spatial material experiential effects are there because there is lawn and trees.

For this studio, we will seek to examine more closely and intentionally, what the specific and “higher” implications and qualities of the intentional, concept-driven, composition of the architecture of landscape. What are the implications of different arrangements of landscape materials? How do we define the architecture of landscape and not just by wall-like clipped hedges? What effects can we harvest from past projects and aspire for in new ones? Furthermore, how do these aspirations structure the remainder of the projects, including the important considerations of how a landscape must be structured to be functional competent. Is the hierarchy loose or rigid? Which and which kind of concepts provide good direction for formal development?

To this end the studio will be function in two different modes. The first will be the study and distillation of landscape concepts in precedent projects, through both field studies on precedents in Los Angeles and remote studies of international projects. To demonstrate and practice their ability to relate concepts to form and space, students will be required to re-represent these concepts in drawings and models, which can speak for themselves (though you will also be required to state your thinking verbally!).

The second mode will be the design of relatively short design projects, based on the precedent studies. For these projects, and as exception for most studios at USC, students will be significantly more focused on an idea of how landscape creates space than the particularities of the site itself. Projects will be focused in developing a hierarchy of concepts that will be represented through the basic design representational methods. Concept will be described by choices made in the rigorous construction of scaled representations.

**Studio will be structured through the following exercises:**

### **Warm Up Tree Space**

***1 week***

Student will build a scaled model of a tree expressing specific spatial aesthetic qualities of their choosing. Students are encouraged to include an element in the model to help express scale. Because a completely realistic rendering is representationally impossible (even with

more time!) the material composition of the model should be rigorously selected, developed, and abstracted to express whatever qualities and ideas about the tree they deem important.

Deliverable(s): 1 tree model. Tree informational sheet (8.5"x11").

**Precedent Study 1 "Clearings" Precedent Field Studies**

*2 weeks*

Students will conduct precedent studies through representational exercises of a site in Los Angeles. The focus of the studies will be to identify spatial experiential concepts and approaches in a selection of Los Angeles parks that will be visited by the studio. Students will select a site based on a lottery following the site visits. Representational products should be tailored to represent conceptually how a specific landscape "architecture" is defined, functions, and the qualities and values that it embodies. This includes how the space is bordered and interacts with adjacent urban space. A specific set of concepts about spatial definition and experience must be developed and declared.

The following "Clearings" / parks will be visited (time allowing):

Tongva Park, Field Operations, Santa Monica, CA

Pershing Square, Ricardo Legoretta & Laurie Olin, Downtown Los Angeles

Grand Park, Rios Clementi Hale, Downtown Los Angeles

Vista Hermosa Park, Mia Lehrer & Associates, Downtown Los Angeles

Lafayette Park, Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles

Deliverable(s): Model, Section

**Design Project 1 "Clearing"**

*4 weeks*

Based in part on the collective concept development of the precedent studies students must develop a concept for a hypothetical "Clearing" or landscape place. The concept cannot be a formal facsimile of a precedent (you can't copy the fluvial curving forms of Tongva Park), but must distill the concepts sufficiently to allow a different formal exploration. For this project, the compositional concept of a "clearing", an opening, or subjective void, is required, but within this framework students must individually develop how and why the space is defined (and to what extent) and importantly what is the desired effect and philosophy. Furthermore, they decide (with the instructors input) on the programmatic concept and whether there is any additional ecological, environmental, or other concepts overlaid. Designs will have no structures over 3.5' tall with the exception of light standards and are expected to use reasonable materials and constructions. A planting plan and rough grading are required. The concept should be expressed through the required deliverables. Site will be provided.

Deliverable(s): Concept Model(s), Final Model, Section, Plan, Montage

**10/8 MID-REVIEW**

**Precedent Study 2 "Linear" Precedent Studies**

*2.5 weeks*

The project for the second of the semester will be about a linear parkway and will look at ideas movement and flow, both by park users and the set of processes that define a site on-going. For the second precedent study of the studio students will choose from a selection of precedents from around the world and develop a set of original representations expressing specific concepts about the presumed experience and conceptual underpinnings. Students will also engage in a curated set of local site visits of linear experiences.

**Deliverable(s): Model, Flexible (TBD)**

**Design Project 2 Linear Parkway**  
**5 weeks**

The final project for the studio will be a linear greenway park. The park program will be partially determined by hypothetical community input and “sustainable” features will be required. Students must develop an landscape “architecture” concept on multiple levels, based in part on their precedent studies. A critical part of the project will be the development of strong aspirational spatial experiential concepts (concepts that suggest a compelling goal that can be developed in a open ended way through a design study process). As in the first project, students will be required to develop a series concept models before completing a final design. A planting plan and rough grading are required. Students must reflect on the hierarchy of their conceptual underpinning. Site will be selected after Mid-Review.

**Deliverable(s): Concept 1 Model(s), Final Model, Section, Plan, Montage**

**FINAL REVIEW TBD**

**Grading**

- Warm Up (6%)
- Precedent Study 1 (15%)
- Project 1 (29%)
- Precedent Study 2 (17%)
- Project 1 (33%)

**Calendar**

Week	Dates	Subject	Notes
1	8/25-29	Introduction / Tree Model	Friday Review of Models
2	9/1-5	Precedent Studies	Labor Day Holiday (Monday)
3	9/8-12	Precedent Studies	
4	9/15-19	1st Project: Clearing	
5	9/22-26	1st Project: Clearing	
6	9/29-10/3	1st Project: Clearing	
7	10/6-10	<b>10/8 Mid Review</b>	

Week	Dates	Subject	Notes
8	10/13-17	Precedent Studies	
9	10/20-24	Precedent Studies	(ACADIA Conference this week)
10	10/27-31	2nd Project: Concept / Precedent	
11	11/3-7	2nd Project: Linear	
12	11/10-14	2nd Project: Linear	
13	11/17-21	2nd Project: Linear	
14	11/24-28	2nd Project: Linear / Holiday	11/26-11/29 Thanksgiving Break
15	12/1-5	2nd Project: Linear	Last week of classes
		Final Review	

### Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

### Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

### Accreditation

The Master of Landscape Architecture degree program includes three curricula. Curriculum +3 for students with no prior design education and Curriculum +2 for students admitted with advanced standing have full accreditation by the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board. Curriculum +1.5 for students with advanced placement is a post-professional study and is not subject to accreditation. Information about landscape architecture education and accreditation in the United States may be found on-line at <http://www.asla.org/Education.aspx>.