Landscape Measure

Animating the University Landscape to Promote Social Distancing

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A University Landscape that...

- provides a safer learning environment
- requires minimal cleaning and maintenance
- teaches social distancing; self-organizing
- encourages outdoor socializations
- reduces interior space loads
- utilizes unused outdoor spaces
- offers significant value while saving $ + Time
- supplies biophilic (nature) engagement

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Students can quickly self-organize

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OUTDOOR spaces are 18.7 x less contagious than INDOOR environments


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K-8 schools, libraries, museums, government spaces, parks, camps, places of worship, corporate parks, daycares, backyards, etc.

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Easy Maintenance

The design prioritizes the important landscape maintenance related factors:

- **6' Paths:** Pathways are 6' clear for social distancing and allows for typical industrial rider mower width (60"-72").

- **Efficient Grid:** Simple grid pattern allows for speedy maintenance. The end of the pathways have extra space to allow the rider mowers to turn.

- **Mow Less - Save $:** 50% of the grass will be left to grow, decreasing the overall amount to cut. This will save on fuel, labor, expense and time. It even provides ecological activities. A great return on investment (ROI).

- **Minimal Intervention:** The design can be easily reset if desired and requires minimal materials and costs.
Location

The Quad is central to university life and already has key walkways that bring high volume of student traffic. Yet its limited spatial definition, like seating areas, places to rest, etc, leaves the Quad relatively underutilized during the year. Small interventions that allow for pause on the landscape could help to build a sense of student community while providing a safer framework for socializing.

Vocal Distance Exercise:
Teacher could audibly reach 22-28 students under ideal conditions with comfortable vocal volumes. A basic test was conducted by the author for this data. Masks, also tested, were found to only slightly reduce volume and clarity. Portable voice amplifying equipment could also be used to extend these distances.

Example Class Patterns:
- 40 Students: A larger class with smaller group discussions.
- 24 Students: A medium size class with lecture possibilities.
- 2-4 Students: “Break Out” Rooms for small group discussions.
- 1-to-1: Office Hours, student questions.

Outdoor Furnishings: Chairs, desks, umbrellas, tables, club booths, etc. could accommodate a variety of event types.

Signage: A diagrammatic sign sharing the intended use and purpose of the project.

Accessible by Wheel Chair especially at edges near walkways and all grass pathways and intersections offer 60” (5’) turn radius.
The pandemic highlights a discussion about learning spaces that are largely hidden behind expensive university walls, tangled with technologies and buttressed by the beautiful gallery of underutilized landscapes. The landscape historian Louise Monzingo refers to these outdoor spaces as products of “pastoral capitalism,” which are meant to reinforce “elite American values as a whole.” The global pandemic coupled with the great social unrest of 2020 suggests an opportunity, if not need, to rethink these open spaces to more critically and artfully serve the academic community.

The project design presented here is situated in an emerging set of pandemic related design projects. In Elblag, Poland an art gallery landscape was cleverly transformed into lawn checkerboard to encourage social distancing. In New York, turf at Domino Park was painted with white circles to space groups of people from each other. Other more formal precedents in landscape architecture such as Juan O’Gorman’s grided quad in front of UNAM Library in Mexico City, Maya Lin’s “Wave Field” at the University of Michigan, Dan Kiley’s “South Garden” at the Art Institute of Chicago, W Architecture and Landscape Architecture’s “West Harlem Piers Park” and the traditional use of mown edges in agrarian landscapes are just few points of inspiration for this design.
Indoor spaces will benefit greatly if students are drawn to outdoor places. Every small decision to conduct business outside, X 1000s of students, could help to lessen exposure inside and also promotes the opportunity to engage social conversations in a significantly safer setting.

The design can accommodate a variety of gathering scales (1-100+ humans) and although the grounds are configured, it allows for new possibilities for socializing, learning and teaching yet to be defined.