2012-2013 Assessment Report  
Program: Landscape Architecture, MLAG

College of Architecture, Design & Construction  
School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape Architecture  
Landscape Architecture, MLAG

Master of Landscape Architecture Mission Statement  
The mission of the Auburn University Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture is to:  
**Educate students in the generation of resilient cultural and social practices through the cultivation of adaptive urban and environmental design strategies.**

Program Outcomes  
The AU Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture will:

1. Produce professional landscape architects who have the requisite creative and adaptive capacities to become disciplinary leaders.
2. Consolidate and expand a creative design research culture enabling faculty and students to produce recognized scholarship that contributes to new ways of thinking in landscape architecture.
3. Challenge and extend the ethics of civic and social engagement through directed outreach that addresses the always-growing range of issues associated with working in the public realm.

Two program outcomes were assessed in 2012-2013. These were outcomes 2 and 3.

First Program Outcome being assessed in 2012-13:  
**Challenge and extend the ethics of civic and social engagement through directed outreach that addresses the always-growing range of issues associated with working in the public realm**

Assessment date  
Fall 2012 and Spring 2013

Number of students  
15 in the Fall semester  
11 in the Spring Semester

Method of assessment  
Faculty Review of Student Work

Description of method  
Observation and analysis of student work from each course, across a range of assessments types and grade outcomes, using the rubric below.

Rubric  
1. Student is able to develop appropriate design solutions for diverse community situations

2. Student communicates their design solutions appropriately and convincingly
Findings

3. Student is able to develop a solution independently of the conflicting needs, wants and desires of community members

4. Student is aware of the different values and attitudes of different communities

5. Student is able to balance economic, social and environmental considerations to achieve a workable design

Outcome One
27% of students performed with excellent ability
30% of students performed with good ability
23% of students performed with fair ability
20% of students performed with poor ability

A 10% margin of difference in numbers between those who performed well and those who did not shows that relatively equal numbers of students fell into each category. Students who did not perform well were mostly ESL students and advanced placement students in the program in an outreach studio for the first time.

Outcome Two
23% of students performed with excellent ability
27% of students performed with good ability
27% of students performed with fair ability
23% of students performed with poor ability

Most students were in the middle categories, with fewer numbers having effective communication skills, and likewise fewer having very poor skills. The students in the lowest category were all ESL internationals. Those in the highest are domestic students who have been in Studio One and are getting used to communicating their work in a public setting.

Outcome Three
10% of students performed with excellent ability
28% of students performed with good ability
52% of students performed with fair ability
10% of students performed with poor ability

The outcomes show that students have difficulty balancing the perceived needs of community members with the requirements of the studio program. MLA Program Outcome Three highlights the growing range of issues associated with working in communities. These are complex and subtle, and students tend to follow the community stakeholders viewpoints rather than make their own decisions based on observation and research.

Outcome Four
60% of students performed with excellent ability
21% of students performed with good ability
19% of students performed with fair ability

The findings demonstrate that students are aware of diversity amongst community members and between communities. ESL students tended to perform well in this regard. Some domestic students scored lower than the internationals.

Outcome Five
12% of students performed with excellent ability
24% of students performed with good ability
54% of students performed with fair ability
10% of students performed with poor ability

The results show that this is the most difficult challenge for design students working in outreach situations. The findings reflect the problems associated with triple bottom line objectives in society as a whole, and highlight the importance of the MLA program’s Learning Outcome that addresses this challenge.

Faculty have refined the Course Aim and Learning Outcomes, relating them specifically to the Program Objective. This meant deciding what the main objective of the course is: normative or experimental design; “beautification” or investigation; tough sites or low-hanging fruit?

Currently working with both of each of these binaries (both/and) and have developed grading criteria that evaluate these, and that discriminate between types.

Faculty are providing greater support and assistance to international students by implementing discussion sessions about regional and national cultural values and traditions.

Faculty are developing LOs that test and measure key outreach design skills and expertise as they develop through the studios.

Have clarified the role of design research in civic and social engagement.

Have separated the types of inquiry by reframing the assignments initially to distinguish between social, economic and environmental factors, and then enables the designs to interrelate these as they mature.

Consolidate and expand a creative design research culture enabling faculty and students to produce recognized scholarship that contributes to new ways of thinking about landscape architecture.

Fall 2012 and Spring 2013

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Faculty Review of Student Work.

All program faculty attend mid term and final reviews of Thesis Studio, and assess the work on the basis of the assessment criteria below.

Survey of current students

Students are surveyed while attending the course to ascertain their
participation in professional organizations (American Society of Landscape Architects Student Chapter) within the program.

**Graduate student survey**

Graduates are surveyed after three months to ascertain their employment status.

**Method 1 assessment criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Considerations</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Craftsmanship</th>
<th>Integrative skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Analysis demonstrates rigor and highly developed understanding of scope.</td>
<td>Clear connection between ideas and their investigation through careful manipulation of design representation and materials. Excellent craftsmanship displays thought and care. Clear demonstration of the importance of the artifact in design production.</td>
<td>New and complex issues are successfully integrated. Seamless integration of depiction and depicted. Comprehensive marshalling and conjoining of the physical, the conceptual and the representational.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sophisticated and attentive design decision-making apparent throughout process.</td>
<td>Logical, confident and iterative procedure generates design outputs that can be described and evaluated in terms of the process.</td>
<td>Attentiveness to the aesthetic of making.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logical, confident and iterative procedure generates design outputs that can be described and evaluated in terms of the process.</td>
<td>Project is fully developed and expresses excitement and wonder.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>New concepts are explored in original ways.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conceptual basis of project demonstrates clear grasp of complex issues (histories, social contexts, ecological issues).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project is fully developed and expresses excitement and wonder.</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Process demonstrates adequate grasp of problems and issues. Clear use of iterative method. Source data employed throughout.</td>
<td>Good quality work, with moderate appeal. Engagement with materiality of representation needs further work. Outputs would improve with greater attentiveness to quality of craft.</td>
<td>Design production shows real understanding of issues, problems, resources and process, but does not quite bring them all together in a unified articulation of design intent.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project process remains within the confines of the known.</td>
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Findings from Method 1

100% of students received an A or a B grade in Thesis Studio through the Fall and Summer semesters. 50% of students in Thesis Studio received an A grade and 50% received a B grade, thereby meeting expectations for their overall design performance. However, the current rubric does not map ongoing student development.

A Student Development Framework has been made. This shows how students performance should develop during the two years they are in the program, and by what criteria their development should be measured.

Method 2 rubric

10% of students will serve in a leadership role in professional organizations within the program.

Findings from method 2

25% of students served as officers in the ASLA student organization. There are currently no other student-based professional organizations affiliated with the program, thereby limiting participation to the number of officer positions.
**Course being assessed**

**LAND 5370/6370: Plant Ephemerality**

This course is the second in a series of three that closely examine the role of plants in the perception and experience of a landscape site.

**Semester course was delivered**

Spring 2013

**Learning objective being assessed**

Upon completion of this course, level 5000 and 6000 students will be able to:

"D.) record effective field notes that document spatial, ephemeral, and performative qualities of plants."

As the design of planted landscapes is a critical component of landscape architectural practice, students’ ability to recognize plants and understand the conditions they require in order to flourish is very important. The L.O. being evaluated at this Peer Assessment event is one of three spread across the three plant courses that, taken together, develop students’ plant identification skills.

**No. of students being evaluated**

20 students

**Date of assessment**

28 April 2014

**Method of assessment**

Sketchbook Assessment

Students are required to hand draw plants, identify them by botanical and common name, and record their conditions for growth. Each plant occupies available to the student body.

**Faculty and students are working to embed a new professional organization within the program.**

**Findings from method 3**

1. 90% of students who wished to, found employment in the discipline within three months of graduation.

2. 100% of students in the class visited at least four professional offices. An employer survey was not undertaken.

**How did you use these findings?**

An Employer Survey has been developed and will be implemented in 2014.

**Additional comments**

The rubrics do not adequately measure creative design research. The current rubrics will be adapted for the assessment of the ability of students to take up leadership positions within the industry, and a new rubric will be developed for measuring creative design research.
one page of the sketchbook, which is required to be an integrated composition of text and graphics.

Rubric

1.) a minimum of 13 plants are hand drawn in the sketchbook

2.) a diverse range of plant types are included within the sketchbook

   The sketchbook should include a minimum of 10% of the any category listed below:

   - forest strata [canopy, shrub, groundplane]
   - native and exotic
   - successional sere [early, mid, late]
   - hydrological conditions [hydric, mesic, xeric]

3.) 75% of the hand-drawn plants should be identifiable by the instructor

4.) A minimum of (5) five annotations are present on each plant entry

5.) All entries depict an integrated relationship between text and image

Findings

1.) 16 of the 20 students (80%) included all 13 plants within their sketchbooks. Within the remaining four students’ sketchbooks, an average of 3 plant entries were missing.

2.) the percentage of plant types are as follows:

   - forest strata [canopy (70%), shrub (15%), groundplane (15%)]
   - native (93%) and exotic (7%)
   - successional sere [early (31%), mid (38%), late (31%)]
   - hydrological conditions [hydric (23%), mesic (62%), xeric (15%)]

3.) 90% of the entries sampled were identifiable by the instructor

   The most common comment from this evaluation is that the students need to not only draw the leaf of the plant, but also need to sketch the overall habit, bark texture, and fruit/flower of the plant.

4.) All entries (100%) include at least (5) five annotations

   As mentioned in finding #1, 4 of the 20 students (20%) did not include all entries required. These four students lacked an average of 3 plant entries each, but all of the entries that were included in the entire group contain at least (5) five annotations.
5.) 60% of the overall entries depict an integrated relationship between text and image

12 of the 20 students need to continue to refine how they integrate graphic drawings and text annotations. The most common comment from this evaluation is that the students need to take more care in writing the text on each entry. The text is too often written sloppily and quickly.

How did you use these findings: Overall, the sketchbooks effectively demonstrate how the students are able to record field notes that document the spatial, ephemeral, and performative qualities of plants as described in the learning outcome.

The plant types are effectively diverse. The instructor will continue to carefully select the plant palette to ensure diversity in the future.

The instructor will continue to verbally remind the students in the field that they need to not only draw the leaf of the plant in their sketchbook, but also to draw the overall habit, bark texture, and fruit/flower of the plant.

The instructor will also work with the students to increase their abilities to integrate written text and drawn sketches in each entry. The instructor will 1.) show the students examples of successfully integrated sketchbooks, and 2.) discuss effective strategies of integrating text and graphics in the field.