MLPD degree enhanced
Changes include new moniker, clarified, overhauled curriculum

Texas A&M’s Master of Land and Property Development degree has undergone changes that two leading real estate scholars said would make the program one of the most competitive of its kind in the world.

The program, formerly known as the Master of Science in Land Development, fine-tuned by administrators with guidance from the scholars’ 2009 review and later reviews by the university, focuses on the creation of real estate asset value through conceptualization, design, delivery and management.

In response to a 2009 program evaluation by Michael Anikeeff, chairman of the Edward St. John Real Estate Program at Johns Hopkins University, and Margaret McFarland, director of the Colvin Institute of Real Estate Development at the University of Maryland, MLPD program administrators added interdisciplinary dual degrees, integrated relevant coursework with the graduate certificate programs offered through the College of Architecture’s five research centers, and developed curriculum with an explicitly defined range of core knowledge and competencies.

In a subsequent university-level review, administrators determined which dual degrees to offer and specifics about which core competencies students should be taught.

Texas A&M’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning is striving to increase access to its classes by offering several online undergraduate courses in summer and fall 2012 with additional plans to offer classes in its transportation certificate program beginning in the spring 2013 semester.

In addition to the flexibility online classes offer in terms of scheduling and students’ ability to “go to class” anywhere there’s an internet connection, Graduate and undergraduate students can maximize their career options by combining degrees in accelerated programs offered at the Texas A&M College of Architecture.

The three-year graduate dual degree programs, offered by the departments of landscape architecture and urban planning, architecture and construction science, provide students an opportunity to combine a Master of Land and Property Development degree with graduate degrees in architecture, construction management or urban planning. Earning two such degrees separately would take at least four years.

Additionally, LAUP has partnered with the Mays Business School to offer a three-year dual degree combining MLPD and Master of Real Estate degrees.

“MLPD is enriched with a high interdisciplinary component,” said Geoffrey Booth, MLPD coordinator.

New dual and articulated programs expedite earning of multiple degrees

Students take a tour of The Woodlands Waterway district during a class that’s part of a revamped Master of Land and Property Development program.

New distance learning courses utilize video conferencing and Internet technologies.

LAUP embracing technology with online course offerings

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Department strengthens programs, adapts to challenges

It is my pleasure to update you on current key Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning initiatives and our plans for the near future. The 2011-12 academic year was very busy and rewarding as we continued strengthening our academic, research, service and engagement programs and strategically adjusted to the numerous challenges faced by universities nationwide.

In Texas, universities, including Texas A&M, are faced with rising enrollment demands, declining state budgets, shifting economic conditions and a rapidly evolving technological environment. The cost, value and quality of higher education and access to it are at the forefront of public debate. There are calls for increased transparency and accountability in the delivery of education, as well as an escalating need to do more with less in the face of declining state and federal funding. This, as we recover from the permanent budget reductions made in 2010.

The net effect, we are making strategic adjustments and adapting to changing times while steadfastly refining and pursuing our priorities. At the university level, the president and provost are pursuing initiatives aimed at positioning Texas A&M as a consensus top-ten U.S. public university by the year 2020. Preliminary reports indicate the university had a successful on-site accreditation visit last April from its regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The final report is due in December 2012.

In last year's newsletter, I discussed Texas A&M's Action 2015 plan, a major, university-level initiative, “Education First,” aimed at advancing and redefining higher education. The initiative considers our teaching, research and service missions as inseparable and interdependent, each supporting the other in a new model of the American university.

Putting education first

At the department level, we are engaging the Education First philosophy through the purposeful design of high-impact learning experiences: service learning, learning communities, international study and undergraduate research. Three activities in the past year — a new urban planning symposium, the completion of an award-winning student-designed park, and our study abroad successes — illustrate our efforts.

Last November, the department organized its inaugural Imagining New Futures symposium. The event featured Dr. Frederick Steiner, dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, and Randale Arendt, noted author and speaker on conservation planning and design. The symposium provided an integral part of the syllabi for landscape architecture, urban planning and land development courses that fall. It also created a platform for engaging local leaders and elected officials in deliberations about the quality and direction of growth in the Brazos Valley. The 25 American Planning Association members who attended earned continuing education certification credits. A second Imagining New Futures symposium set for November will feature noted planner and land use lawyer, Chris Deuker, who specializes in smart growth implementation strategies and sustainable development plan and code revisions.

The July 13 dedication of Herman Little Park in Spring, Texas culminated a longstanding community engagement initiative undertaken by students in Dr. Jon Rodiek’s graduate landscape architecture studio. The park, part of an award-winning system of recreational spaces that Rodiek’s students have designed for the Timber Lane Utility District in Harris County’s Precinct 3, is a notable example of how a funded service learning and engagement project can leverage significant external resources. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Outdoor Recreation Grant provided half of the funding for the $1 million park project. The new park creates a positive impact of significant value for this Texas community.

Over 90% of our landscape architecture studios and planning and land development capstone courses engage in service learning projects. Last April, one such project, a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use downtown core concept for College Station developed by students in Professor Bruce Dvorak’s studio was recognized by Texas as Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Likewise, a downtown revitalization project undertaken for the city of Sealy, Texas by Dr. Elise Bright’s graduate urban planning capstone class received a 2011 Student Project Award from the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association.

The department has also significantly enriched undergraduate student learning experiences in its study abroad programs in Bonn, Germany and Barcelona, Spain, introducing supportive curricula enhanced by well-articulated, measurable learning outcomes. Under the leadership of Dr. Chang-Shan Huang, 17 students participating in the fall 2011 Bonn study abroad program planned and designed an urban redevelopment project for the city on the west bank of the Rhine River, producing stunning hardcover books of their work. Landscape architecture and urban planning students are now participating equally in the department’s study abroad programs, enhancing opportunities for interdisciplinary learning experiences.

Academic enhancements

The department is continually strengthening and improving its academic programs and curriculum. For 2012, our Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and Master of Landscape Architecture degree programs were nationally ranked third and eighth respectively by the Design Futures Council in its Design Intelligence publication, “American’s Best Architecture and Design Schools in 2012.” Last year, a three-person accreditation team reviewed the MLA program, which unconditionally met all seven accreditation standards. Dr. Jon Rodiek and the dedicated landscape architecture faculty deserve credit for this excellent outcome. Additionally, in anticipation of the end this December of our Master of Urban Planning program’s seven-year accreditation, we just completed a self-study report. An on-site MUP accreditation visit is schedule this spring.

Forster Ndubisi
Department Head
Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning

Last February, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved changing the name of our “Master of Science in Land Development” program to “Master of Land and Property Development.” The change was needed to align the program’s name with its mission and goals, to strengthen its brand identity, and to better reflect the skills and knowledge provided by the Texas A&M University experience. Additionally, we have implemented key recommendations from a 2010 external review of the MLPD program, including a major clarification and restructuring of the core knowledge and competencies in the curriculum. The name change was also part of the recommendations.

The department has introduced three-year dual graduate degree programs and five-year articulated undergraduate/graduate programs. We also offer the first intercollegiate dual degree program, which combines the MLPD degree offered by the College of Architecture with the Master of Real Estate degree offered by the Mays Business School. New articulated 4+2 degree programs offered by the department combine the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (a five-year professional degree) with either an MLPD or MUP degree. The offerings enable high-achieving students to complete both degrees in 6 years. These emerging joint degree programs add four dual master degrees and two articulated undergraduate/graduate degrees to the department’s repertoire. And, we are the only department at Texas A&M offering dual graduate degree programs.

LAUP research is flourishing

Due to the excellent work of our highly productive faculty in ongoing research and the acquisition of numerous competitive grants, LAUP research programs are flourishing. In the past year, faculty have...
This fall, students from a variety of academic programs at Texas A&M University will begin collaborating on an interdisciplinary, three-year project to install and monitor a green roof and living wall atop the Langford Architecture Center on the Texas A&M campus; an initiative aimed at preparing students to become leaders in energy conservation and resource management, said Bruce Dvorak, an assistant professor of landscape architecture who is spearheading the effort.

The project is funded by a $100,000 Texas A&M reallocation grant for enhancing students’ preparation for the workplace and society through high-impact learning experiences. Green roofs have many benefits, such as reducing the “urban heat island” effect by absorbing light that would otherwise turn into heat energy, absorbing storm water and decreasing runoff, improving air quality and turning an unused space into a potential commercial or recreational space.

“A living wall, said Dvorak, “is a vegetated wall designed to achieve benefits similar to green roofs, but much less is known about its performance.”

The effort, Dvorak said, will engage up to 1000 students in three colleges from at least seven undergraduate programs, including architecture, construction science, environmental geosciences, environmental studies, landscape architecture, horticulture and meteorology.

“Green roof technology evolved in Europe to mitigate ecological stresses from urban development such as flooding, urban heat islands, air pollution, and drought prevention,” said Dvorak. “In North America, green roof research is beginning to demonstrate similar benefits; however, research in southern U.S. climates is lacking behind the northern U.S.”

The project will add to the findings from green roof research Dvorak began atop the Langford A building in 2009. The first year of the project, he said, will provide learning experiences well beyond a traditional classroom setting, as students build, install and maintain all of the elements of the green roof, including physical structures, standard meteorological and soil monitoring instrumentation, planning and plant maintenance, manual measurement and associated live and stored data processing and display.

An online interface for the project will also be developed, benefiting students and the community at large, said Dvorak. Astrid Volder, assistant professor of horticultural sciences and Don Conlee, instructional associate professor of atmospheric sciences, will also be involved with the project.

After the roof is established, students will install monitoring instrumentation and construct the living wall.

“Future leaders will need hands-on experiences to understand expectations and limitations of ‘green’ technologies because they are becoming encouraged and mandated in North American cities,” Dvorak said.

The project, he added, will also raise awareness of “green” technologies, demonstrate the feasibility of their widespread use of green roofs, and train a new generation of practitioners in the green economy while providing faculty, students and administrators with an opportunity to better understand performance expectations of green roofs and living walls in a safe and controlled setting. The project will also provide opportunities for additional graduate and undergraduate research, he said.

The most famous green roof in the U.S., perhaps, sits on Chicago’s City Hall. The Washington, D.C. headquarters of the American Society of Landscape Architects sports a green roof, as does a U.S. Post Office building in Manhattan.
Students contribute to rebirth of Beaumont housing project

A declining public housing development in Beaumont severely damaged by Hurricane Rita in 2005 has been rebuilt through a federal grant into a successful, sustainable community, concludes a study headed by Shannon Van Zandt, interim director of Texas A&M’s Center for Housing & Urban Development.

Graduate and undergraduate students from the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning became involved with the project in the fall 2005 semester, providing designs, master plans, recommendations and community research, which formed the basis for the development’s rebuilding through a HOPE VI grant.

“Overall, the direct impacts of the grant program have been extraordinary,” said the study’s final report. “The physical redevelopment of the sites, the building of community among neighbors, and particularly the building of networks and capacity among community partners are truly impressive.”

Magnolia Gardens, originally built in 1953, became dilapidated and subject to increasing crime. An engineering firm hired by the Beaumont Housing Authority in 2004 recommended the site be demolished and redeveloped.

Just weeks after the housing authority teamed with LAUP students to create redevelopment plans, Hurricane Rita tore through Magnolia Gardens, felling trees that crashed through units while blowing away roofs and siding. After the storm, mold began to grow in the units.

Students developed plans informed the design of Pointe North, an acclaimed Beaumont Housing Authority project created to replace the aging Magnolia Gardens housing project, which was damaged by Hurricane Rita.

LAUP students returned to the site in the spring 2006 semester. Led by faculty members Van Zandt, Cecilia Giusti, June Martin and Nancy Volkman, students surveyed the development’s remaining residents, housing authority staff and city of Beaumont personnel to inform their redesign proposal and create options for bringing investment and economic development to the neighborhood.

The authority’s collaboration with the students led to its receiving the 2007 National Award of Merit from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials.

What remained of Magnolia Gardens after the hurricane was

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generated grants from federal and non-profits agencies including the National Science Foundation, the Department of Homeland Security, the National Institute of Health, the Federal Highway Administration and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Last June, two of our faculty members received a $440,000 grant from the NSF to examine the hazard mitigation practices of communities along Gulf and Atlantic coasts. These grants typically provide funds for graduate and undergraduate students who work with faculty while learning how to conduct research.

According to the Academic Analytics database completed in June 2012, our faculty members proved highly productive when ranked against faculty at the 46 planning schools in the United States that offer doctoral degrees, including such reputable universities as Harvard, MIT, Cornell, the University of Michigan and the University of California, Berkeley. Academic Analytics is third-party software used by universities to assess how their programs compare to equivalent programs across the country. The application organizes 27 variables into five key indicators: publications in reputable outlets, competitive federal grants received, articles and books cited, books published and prestigious awards received.

In the first three categories, our faculty rank among the top ten percent — in the 95 percentile of competitive federal grants; the 95 percentile in citations; the 90 percentile in grants received. We are in the middle of the pack in terms of books produced (50%) and awards won (60%). To illustrate what this means, citation count, for example, refers to how many times other researchers and scholars referenced a faculty member’s publication. It is an indication of the quality and impact of an article or book written by that faculty. Put simply, our faculty members do excellent work that is recognized and cited by others.

These outcomes are clearly consistent with the university’s goal of becoming a top ten public university in the United States by 2020. I am pleased that we are playing an important role in moving the university to achieve its mission.

New online course offerings

Technological innovations are shaping the way educational programs are delivered today. Over the past 18 months, we organized seven workshops on technology-mediated learning and online course delivery in conjunction with the university’s Instructional Technology Services. Three of our graduate students and 12 faculty participated in all seven workshops.

This summer during the first session, the department successfully offered the College of Architecture’s first online course, URSC 301 (Urban Planning). Four more online courses are scheduled for the second session: LAND 200 (Introduction to Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning), URSC 325 and PLAN 625 (Geographic Information Systems) and URSC 330 (Land Development).

A department proposal for creating a distance learning option for its Graduate Certificate in Transportation Planning is awaiting university approval. The offering will require converting four existing graduate courses into online courses, which should be completed by August 2012. These online and hybrid (online face-to-face) courses provide added value for students, but will not replace courses currently offered. Instead, they increase access and provide flexibility to students who have conflicts in taking the courses needed to graduate or who cannot be physically present at College Station. One student who took the online URSC 301 course this summer was in Alaska participating in an internship program. Offering these courses online increases the likelihood for students to graduate in a timely manner.

New transportation faculty

Finally, Dr. Wei Li, who completed his doctoral degree from the University of California at Irvine, joins the department this fall as a tenure-track assistant professor with expertise in transportation planning. He will also hold a joint appointment with the Texas Transportation Institute. Dr. Li is a welcomed addition to our transportation planning program. Our former full-time transportation faculty and coordinator of the Certificate in Transportation Planning, Dr. Eric Dumbaugh, is now interim director of the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida Atlantic University.

I am grateful for your collective support as we adjust strategically to these changing times. Our commitment to seeking excellence in our teaching, research, creative, service and engagement programs is relentless and uncompromising. I especially thank our advisory board members in landscape architecture, urban planning, and land and property development for their fledging support of our programs. We look forward to your continued and steadfast support as we move our programs to the next level of excellence.
Research aims at cleaning up stormwater runoff pollutants

Sustainable methods for reducing pollutants in stormwater runoff are being developed and tested by Ming-Han Li, associate department head at Texas A&M’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, with the help of $1.8 million in grant funds.

Among those efforts, Li heads a 5-year, $565,364 project examining bioretention, a “green” water filtering process advocated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to clean stormwater runoff in urban and suburban landscapes.

Bioretention uses various layers of vegetation, soil and gravel to filter pollutants by physical, chemical and biological means. Plant roots take out pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorus, while soil absorbs metals such as zinc, lead and pathogens such as E. coli.

“The results will provide fundamental knowledge needed for designing bioretention systems that can effectively remove pathogens from highway stormwater runoff in semi-arid regions like Texas … this will be a unique contribution to the field,” said Li. His collaborators on the project include two environmental engineers and an environmental scientist with a planning background.

To determine an ideal configuration of plants and soil, the team built five pilot bioretention units on state highway 6 in Bryan planted or seeded with either shrubs, grass species specified for Texas highway applications, Texas native grasses or Bermuda grass, and a unit without vegetation to serve as a control subject. Runoff with known levels of pollutants were injected into the units and, to mimic highway conditions, were allowed to operate without weed control.

While plants’ roots are necessary for pollutant removal, they also decrease the water’s detention time, reducing the cleaning that runoff receives from soil. Li and his research collaborators are determining how to optimize performance between roots and detention time — while dealing with fire ants, whose elaborate tunnels become an expressway for water.

“This research bridges disciplinary gaps,” said Li. “We’re combining landscape architecture and engineering disciplines to eventually create aesthetically pleasing, environmentally conscious and functional designs,” he said.

Another three-year, $736,293 Texas Department of Transportation-funded study that will ultimately provide TxDOT with guidance on complying with changing federal runoff regulations pairs Li as a co-principal investigator with researchers from the Texas Transportation Institute, the University of Texas and Texas Tech University.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has drawn up new, tighter construction site stormwater runoff regulations taking effect in 2013. The new rules will apply to all sites disturbing 20 or more acres of land at a time. In 2014, the limits will apply to construction sites disturbing 10 or more acres of land.

Since TxDOT’s construction activities are considered a source of pollution in terms of stormwater quality, its sites must also be compliant with EPA regulations, said Li.

“Because turbidity, or opacity, has never been a concern for stormwater before, TxDOT is seeking research-based solutions for meeting this soon-to-be-implemented rule,” he said.

The research team is conducting experiments to:

• determine typical turbidity of runoff collected by TxDOT’s drainage structures at construction sites,
• collect performance data on innovative erosion and sediment control measures, such as bioretention, that might be expected to achieve the discharge standard, and
• produce guidance measures and sampling protocols for TxDOT to negotiate with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality in the development of statewide monitoring/sampling procedures.

In low-slope regions such as Houston, the Texas’ gulf coast and high plains, traditional methods to estimate water runoff characteristics in highway designs can yield unreliable results.

Li’s 2009-2011 project, undertaken with $464,000 in funding from TTI, employed literature, data, modeling and physical experiments to determine when alternate approaches should be considered and provided guidance on what approaches are appropriate in low-slope situations.

“Uncertainty in these cases often results in costly over design or under design and liability for damage,” wrote Li and his collaborators. Identification of dimensionless slopes where traditional estimating techniques become suspect, they said, is important so analysts can apply appropriate methods based on locale.

Li collaborated with researchers from Texas Tech, the Texas Water Science Center and R.O. Anderson Engineering.
New center provides researchers access to nonpublic federal data

Valuable sociological and economic data collected by the federal government but not available to the general public will soon be available to select researchers from Texas and the surrounding region with the opening this fall of the Texas Census Research Data Center at Texas A&M University.

One of 12 such data hubs in the United States, the TXCRDC will provide researchers working on pre-approved projects with access to this useful federal database of facts and figures that was previously unavailable in Texas. The closest data center is currently located in Atlanta, Georgia, nearly 900 miles from the Texas A&M campus.

A National Science Foundation grant provides initial funding for the center, to be located in the Donald L. Houston Building, 200 Discovery Drive on the west side of the Texas A&M campus.

The funds were awarded in response to a multidisciplinary proposal penned by Texas A&M faculty from the departments of sociology, statistics and the College of Architecture’s Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, with support from a consortium including the Texas A&M System, Baylor University, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas at San Antonio.

“The data center will have a broad impact by enhancing research capabilities and the quality of projects that can be undertaken by leading researchers at major research universities and advanced research institutions in Texas and the surrounding region,” said Walter Gillis Peacock, HHRC director. “It will give our research community and associated graduate programs access to microdata related to the entire U.S. population, including individuals and businesses.”

Peacock, top disaster researchers mulling hazard research network

Momentum is mounting for the creation of the first ever, U.S. National Science Foundation-funded network of researchers dedicated to investigating disaster resilience, vulnerability and risk reduction, said Walter Gillis Peacock, director of Texas A&M’s Hazard Reduction & Recovery Center and champion of the interdisciplinary network proposal.

Peacock led a June 1-2, 2011 meeting at the NSF headquarters in Arlington, Va., attended by a diverse field of leaders from numerous disciplines — hazard researchers, sociologists, engineers, planners, architects, anthropologists, economists, geographers and seismologists — eagerly discussing details of the proposed network, tentatively named Creating a More Resilient America.

With almost every new major disaster event, said CAMRA organizers, the United States loses yet another new record for disaster losses, mimicking a much more dramatic worldwide trend.

Population growth, they said, is increasingly occurring in areas highly vulnerable to flooding, hurricanes or earthquakes. This expansion is often accompanied by the destruction of hazard mitigating systems such as wetlands and other important environmental resources.

Peacock said conference attendees want the NSF to fund an initial set of research nodes, each focused on a major urban and rural area that is subject to natural hazards such as flooding, hurricanes and earthquakes. These groups would provide regional resiliency and vulnerability research that integrates the physical, social and engineering sciences.

Li, Dvorak to research benefits of high-performance landscapes

Three Texas A&M researchers have joined an elite group of 10 research teams in an effort funded by the Landscape Architecture Foundation aiming to make the concept of landscape performance and its contribution to sustainability as well known as building performance is today.

The effort, called the Case Study Investigation program, was conceived by the foundation as a key impetus in moving the landscape architecture profession toward designing every project with specific performance objectives, routinely collecting performance data and integrating landscape performance in design education.

Ming-Han Li, associate professor of landscape architecture, Bruce Dvorak, assistant professor of landscape architecture and Yi Luo, an urban and regional science Ph.D. student, partnered with four landscape architecture firms, will be quantifying the benefits of four of the firms’ high-performance landscapes, a category broadly defined as landscapes providing environmental, economic or social benefits greater than conventionally designed or unimproved areas.

High-performance landscapes can include elaborate designs such as Beijing Olympic Forest Park, which includes a mountain and a lake, or Park Seventeen, a 7th floor deck between two Dallas high-rises that includes a swimming pool, shaded seating and an artificial lawn.

They will develop methods to quantify environmental, economic and social benefits and report their findings in an online, interactive set of resources to show the value of sustainable landscape solutions and provide tools for designers, agencies and advocates to quantify benefits and make the case for sustainable landscapes.

Researchers will work with the following firms and their landscape designs: Beijing Tsinghua Urban Planning & Design Institute, Beijing Olympic Forest Park and the Tangshan Nanhu Eco-city Central Park; SWA Group. Cross Creek Ranch; and TBG, Park Seventeen.

Housing project

Continued from Page 4

Demolished in 2008.

Conclusions from the 2012 study, funded by the HOPE VI grant and conducted by Van Zandt, Martin, Giusti and Dawn Jourdan, an assistant professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Florida and Edward Tarlton, a Ph.D. student in Urban and Regional Science at Texas A&M, relied on an assessment of demographic, social and physical indicators, resident interviews and surveys.

The main findings of the study were:

- physical redevelopment of the community has been highly successful;
- the Beaumont Housing Authority is offering a consistent and satisfactory level of service to residents;
- residents’ incomes are up, and poverty rates are down;
- wages are increasing in the revitalization area and the diversity of the economy in the revitalization area is encouraging.

The researchers also pointed to a persistently higher-than-average crime rate and the state of the national economy as two of the Beaumont community’s most troubling issues.
A report, published by the Texas Transportation Institute, an agency of the Texas A&M University System, suggests too little progress is being made ensuring the nation's transportation system will be able to keep up with job growth when the economy improves.

The 2011 Urban Mobility Report, which documents increasing congestion on U.S. roads, was authored, in part, by Tim Lomax, a lecturer in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at Texas A&M University. “Congestion does more than choke our highways, it chokes our economy, making it harder to buy what we need and harder to keep or find a job,” Lomax says. “That's a bad thing — especially when our economic recovery is so fragile.”

Lomax discussed the study in a Sept. 27 “Today” show segment and in a Sept. 28 USA Today report.

**Study eyes effects of built environment on kids' activity**

Chanam Lee, professor of urban planning at Texas A&M, told the American Public Health Association how the built environment can impede the physical activity of children and overweight adults at the group's annual meeting last fall in Washington, D.C.

Lee made two presentations during the conference, which focused on current and emerging health science, policy and practice issues. The event drew more than 13,000 national and international physicians, administrators, nurses, educators, researchers, epidemiologists and related health specialists.

In one session, Lee revealed survey results in which overweight and obese adults in Central Texas identified substantial environmental barriers to walking, such as insufficient night lighting, unattended dogs and a lack of continuous sidewalks.

Lee said older adults surveyed also revealed a lack of environmental motivators for physical activity, “such as proximity to parks and recreational facilities and walking paths/trails.”

In her other APHA presentation, Lee discussed how, using environmental audits, her research team found that children were discouraged from walking near schools, when they were located next to vacant, abandoned or underdeveloped areas, or lacked sidewalk connections, sufficient street lights, traffic calming devices or bike lanes.

“Environmental audits, she said, “can help identify areas needing improvement, facilitating policy development toward creating healthier communities for reducing childhood obesity.”

**Research aims to improve understanding of flood risk**

Two Texas A&M urban planning professors have garnered a two-year, $313,000 National Science Foundation grant to research the effectiveness of using 100-year floodplains in predicting property damages from floods, and to develop improved criteria for assessing the risk of inundation in low-lying coastal areas.

“An improved understanding of flood risk will enable localities to better protect themselves against loss of property and lives in coastal areas,” said researchers Sam Brody and Michael Lindell, professors of urban planning, and Wes Highfield, a research scientist at Texas A&M University at Galveston’s Center for Texas Beaches and Shores, in their project abstract.

Brody is the project’s principal investigator and Lindell and Highfield are the project’s co-P.I.’s.

The 100-year floodplain, which designates land where there is a one percent chance of flooding every year, is the longstanding metric for determining and acting upon the risk of an area being inundated by a flood event.

“Increasing evidence suggests that the 100-year floodplain is neither accurate nor sufficient in guiding communities and household decisions to mitigate the adverse impacts of floods,” states the research abstract. “The inability of the floodplain designation to effectively capture the likelihood of property loss, and possibly human lives, has left potentially millions of property owners unaware of their flood risk and made it more difficult for local decision makers to ensure community development occurs in a resilient manner.”

The researcher team will address this problem by offering empirical insights into the predictive value of the 100-year floodplain and suggest improved criteria for assessing risk of inundation in the three-phase project.

“This research will not only ascertain the effectiveness of the 100-year floodplain in predicting observed damage and human response, but will also generate results that will lead to more precise spatial criteria of risk in rapidly developing coastal areas,” said the researchers.

The study’s findings will be delivered in an accessible, easy-to-understand format for use by public officials and coastal residents, as well as by households that may be outside the floodplain but still at high risk for flood losses.

Data from the study will be available online in the Texas Coastal Communities Planning Atlas, where users will be able to identify and visualize information on flood risk in their neighborhoods.

The research team also plans to deliver information — through partnerships with neighborhood associations and other stakeholder groups — to residents of vulnerable neighborhoods, many of whose residents belong to underrepresented groups that do not traditionally have easy access to flood risk information.
**MLPD enriched**

*Continued from Page 1*

“We also consulted with the program’s Development Industry Advisory Committee and other industry leaders to find out what they expected from our graduates,” said MLPD coordinator Geoffrey Booth, who holds the Youngblood Endowed Professorship in Land Development. “Once you’ve had students’ core competencies determined, anyone that employs an MLPD graduate can be confident that a student can do this range of skills,” he said.

Additionally, Booth went through each course to identify student learning outcomes and the rubrics used to demonstrate that students have achieved those outcomes.

“And then we’re putting all those artifacts, those evidential pieces of work, in a portfolio for that student to use to get internships and employment positions,” said Booth. “So there’s a logical progression as you work down from the program level, to the subject level, to the evidential assessment pieces and then evidentiary material.”

MLPD program requirements were also guided by a review performed by Deborah Fowler, associate director at Texas A&M’s Center for Teaching Excellence.

“She helped with setting up our learning outcomes, mapping out our curriculum, finding where overlaps and gaps are in the curriculum, setting the rubrics to make sure we’re meeting the learning outcomes, and getting the evidentiary material to form the portfolios,” said Booth.

Students who enrolled in the Master of Science and Land Development program can still graduate with an MSLD degree or with the revamped MLPD requirements.

During the summer 2011 semester, Chicago’s Millennium Park, praised as a showcase of art and urban design, served as an opportunity for the program to deliver on its new direction and two major Texas A&M education initiatives, “Education First” and “Aggies Commit,” said Booth.

Two students, Serena Conti and Ryan Mikulenko, traveled to Chicago to collaborate with real estate graduate students at DePaul University to measure the park’s impact on its surrounding area using a matrix included in a book by Dennis Jerke ’78, a former Master of Landscape Architecture student. Their research findings and a video about the study were posted online after their return and used for material in MLPD classes.

“This interdisciplinary study also represents the application of Education First, a holistic vision of academic excellence at Texas A&M,” said Booth.

Education First is a strategic plan headed by Karan Watson, the university’s provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, that includes the integration of teaching, research and service.

“The project obviously delivered a return to Texas citizens by looking at a ‘best practice’ example we can learn from,” he said. “We can apply those lessons here in the classroom and in the solutions we come up with for projects in Texas.”

Booth added that the use of the matrix in Jerke’s book, “Urban Design and the Bottom Line: Optimizing the Return on Perception,” is a significant example of the lifelong learning component of “Aggies Commit,” a program involving the university’s core values and student outcomes outlined in Texas A&M’s Academic Master Plan.

“Aggies Commit underscores the purpose and value of lifelong learning and how Aggies can give back by writing books based on their knowledge,” he said. “It creates a foundation for new research and knowledge development, not to mention a robust platform for learning and service.”

Students have also used the matrix Jerke developed to evaluate numerous other projects in Texas, such as Market Street in The Woodlands, the Dallas Design District and the Lampsas County Courthouse. Videos and student reports from these and additional projects are available on the university’s Real Estate Development Association website.

All proceeds from the sale of Jerke’s book are channeled back to the college to enrich and fund academic endeavors, another example of “Aggies Commit,” said Booth.

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**Online offerings**

*Continued from Page 1*

Net connection, technology-based learning can be a way for students to get deeper in class material, said Forster Ndubisi, head of the department.

“For instance, you could have a lecture online about a topic which students would watch before class,” he said. “When students get to class, a professor can lead a discussion instead of giving a lecture,” he said.

In the first 2012 summer session, June Martin, senior lecturer in urban planning, taught an undergraduate planning class, and the department has scheduled three more undergraduate classes in geographic information systems, land development and a planning and landscape architecture course to be taught in the second summer session.

Douglas Wunneburger, senior lecturer of urban planning, is scheduled to lead undergraduate and graduate GIS courses this fall.

The online transportation certificate classes are being developed with help from a Federal Highway Administration grant; Ndubisi is looking at spring 2013 for the department to begin offering those courses.

To ready themselves to teach distance learning classes, about a dozen LAUP faculty attended a series of six workshops led by Texas A&M’s Center for Teaching Excellence with topics including course and instructional materials development, software, tools and distance conferencing.

Faculty also heard from Carol Molinari, an associate professor of health systems management at the University of Baltimore, whose research interests include examining effective pedagogy for online and hybrid courses, or courses that are a combination of “face-to-face” classroom instruction and online learning.

Ndubisi doesn’t see the online offerings as replacing a traditional setting, however.

“All of the transportation classes will be taught ‘face-to-face’ and offered online,” he said. “I have established consistent standards for all online classes that include identifying learning objectives for each particular week, video lectures and additional references both in terms of text and audiovisual references, and links to newspaper articles or case studies in the library, all related to a class discussion question which could be a real-time conference once a week, in which students can log in from anywhere to participate.”

LAUP isn’t new to technology-based learning. Sam Brody, professor of urban planning, who has a joint appointment at Texas A&M at Galveston where he is the director of the Center for Texas Beaches and Shores, uses videoconferencing technology to teach students on the island and in College Station the same class by alternating between campuses from week to week.

The department also has a new videoconferencing facility in the Langford Architecture Center that provides students in small classes with the capability of interacting virtually with anyone, anywhere on the globe with Internet access.

Ndubisi has also thought about online courses in the cornerstone of a landscape architecture education, the studio.

“It holds potential,” he said. “Design firms with offices in different cities work on projects by sharing files and interacting through Skype. I’m looking at this in terms of how technology can enhance the learning experience, while maintaining a strong belief that students need personal contact.”
New Futures forum to focus on sustainable development

Chris Duerksen, a nationally known proponent of adopting community development codes that directly address sustainability issues, will headline “Imagining New Futures,” the second annual urban planning workshop set for Nov. 15 – 17 at Texas A&M.

Hosted by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning and the Association of Student Planners, the workshop focuses on sustainable planning and land development and is tailored for students, academicians and professionals in the fields of urban planning, land development, landscape architecture and urban and regional science.

Duerksen, managing director of Clarion Associates, LLC, a national land-use consulting firm, will lecture on strategies for sustainable development and lead a five-hour workshop.

The event’s schedule includes an array of optional social activities, including a Nov. 16 nighttime mixer, a Saturday morning clay shooting session and eco-tour at the nearby Tonkaway Ranch, and a tailgate party prior to Texas A&M’s Nov. 17 football game against Sam Houston State University.

Duerksen is cofounder of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute and has represented local governments, nonprofits, and the private sector in a variety of land-use and zoning matters. He is an advocate of development codes that address energy conservation and production, for instance, by requiring that subdivisions be laid out to take advantage of solar power or by removing impediments to using compact residential wind turbines.

“We must act now — there is no time to lose,” wrote Duerksen in “Saving the World Through Zoning” a 2008 article in an American Planning Association publication. “Polar ice is melting at an alarming rate. We are beginning to run out of fossil fuels just when China and India are creating enormous new demands. A global population surge will gobble up enormous amounts of food just as our land base is being diverted to fuel crops.”

He argues municipalities can address these issues by revamping zoning models that stifle mixed-use developments and contribute to sprawl.

Land use expert and sustainability champion Chris Duerksen will lecture and lead a workshop on sustainable development strategies at the November Imaging New Futures Forum.

Duerksen has more than 20 years experience as a land use lawyer and has represented clients in a variety of land-use and zoning matters.

He received a law degree from the University of Chicago and an undergraduate liberal arts degree from Kansas State College. His numerous projects have included development codes and growth management plans for a variety of small and medium-sized cities.

A member of the Illinois Bar Association, Duerksen has authored many books and articles on land use and conservation issues, including “Takings Law in Plain English,” “Nature-Friendly Communities: Habitat Protection and Land Use Planning,” and “Aesthetics, Community Character, and the Law.”

Duerksen is managing director of Clarion Associates, a national land-use and real estate consulting firm with offices in seven U.S. cities that provide public and private-sector clients with urban design, environmental assessment and community planning services.

The 2011 “Imagining New Futures” featured Randall Arendt, the nation’s foremost authority on conservation development, who conducted a workshop focusing on designing residential habitats that protect natural resources while creating value for developers and property owners.

Online registration for the 2012 forum will soon be available online. For details, contact the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at 979.845.1019.

Dual degrees

Booth said Will Paton, who earned master’s degrees in land development and architecture in 2011, is using knowledge from both disciplines as a financial analyst at Transwestern, a commercial real estate services, investment and development company.

“With his background in both degrees, he knows how to look behind a project’s numbers and understand what it is about a building’s design that’s likely to enhance its performance,” said Booth. “His design background enables him to look at a real estate asset and know whether it’s likely to perform well.”

“With a graduate construction management degree,” said Booth, “one knows how to build a building and how to put together a construction and/or project management team, but not a development team. With a dual degree, if you went to work for a builder, you’d have the skills to do land subdivision as well as the management side of constructing strip malls, shopping centers, multifamily housing and industrial buildings and office buildings.”

A former student with a dual degree, working at a construction organization that chooses to move into development would have the qualifications to assist in the transition, he said.

Students graduating with MLPD and planning degrees will know how to combine today’s planning initiatives, said Booth.

“A lot of urban planning is now done in public/private partnerships,” he said. “It’s moved beyond land use regulation, so if you understand how real estate development occurs you can produce planning schemes with the private sector using public assets to create the urban outcome you’re looking for.”

The MLPD and Master of Real Estate Degree offered by Texas A&M’s Mays Business School combines the MLPD’s development component with the MRE’s finance and investment emphasis.

“With an MRE, you could get a job in the financial sector, but with the MLPD degree, the additional understanding of how development actually comes together strengthens your professional prospects,” said Booth.

To begin a dual degree program, students apply to both programs in their fields of study. Students pursuing dual degrees write professional papers relevant to both programs.

There aren’t a lot of institutions in the U.S. that offer these options, said Booth.

“The dual degree options receive a lot of interest from students once they’re in the MLPD program and I think it’s going to be a very strong recruiting tool once prospective students learn about them,” he said.

Undergraduate students in the Texas A&M’s urban and regional planning program can simultaneously pursue master degrees in urban planning or land and property development through the five-year articulated degree programs offered by LAUP. Additionally, new articulated 4+2 degree programs offered by the department combine the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (a five-year professional degree) with either an MLPD or MUP degree.

“The offerings,” said Forster Ndubisi, head of the LAUP department, “enable high-achieving students to complete both degrees in 6 years.”

“These options are very attractive for our undergraduate planning students,” said Cecilia Giusti, coordinator of the Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning program.

“Instead of taking four years to earn a bachelor’s degree then two more to earn a master’s degree, students can work with an academic advisor and carefully select a program that lets them do both in 5 years,” she said.

These are very attractive options offered by the department, and they are key in recruiting efforts, said Giusti. “The articulated degree programs require highly qualified and motivated students and a lot of work by advisers and coordinators to ensure students comply with requirements for both degrees,” she said.
Study abroad students re-imagine Bonn’s Rhine riverfront

Design and planning students at Texas A&M envisioned turning the downtown Rhine riverfront in Bonn, Germany into a destination for residential and business development and tourism during a fall 2011 study abroad studio.

Their recommendations for the riverfront included central plaza designs, increased green space and pedestrian path connectivity, boardwalk and riverbank development, decreasing the amount of physical barriers and preserving and enhancing historical monuments.

The students, led by Chang-Shan Huang, associate professor of landscape architecture, also recommended changes to a riverfront area that includes two of Bonn’s major attractions, Beethovenhalle, a concert venue memorializing Bonn native Ludwig von Beethoven, and the city’s opera house.

“The distance between the two is minimal but with the area’s existing conditions they feel kilometers apart,” said the students who created the design.

They proposed an art history promenade to connect the venues, with freestanding silhouette sculptures of important artists and plaques with information about their lives and the influence they had on the city’s cultural development.

Students, advised by German landscape architects Johannes Bottger, Thomas Knuvener and David Baier, and teaching assistant Adam Nugent, a Master of Landscape Architecture student, developed their proposals in three phases.

First, in a site inventory and analysis phase, students learned about Bonn as a cultural landscape.

“The goal of this phase was to teach students how to study a cultural landscape they’re unfamiliar with and help them better understand the physical, social, economic, demographic, historical, cultural and regulatory context of the project at the city and regional scale,” said Huang, holder of the Harold L. Adams ‘61 Endowed Interdisciplinary Professorship in Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning.

In the project’s next phase, students used what they learned in phase one to develop comprehensive design programs and schematic master plans for the entire project area, measuring approximately two miles long and a half-mile wide.

In the final phase, students created detailed site designs illustrating their vision for the site and accessed strategies for realizing the project.

Landscape architecture students demonstrated how goals, objectives and concepts established for the master plan can be implemented at a site-design level of detail.

The urban planning students took the information and choices of the first two phases, creating implementation strategies, including policy and development considerations that the proposed changes to the urban landscape would entail.

Students also developed an alternative master plan and detailed site plans for the riverfront during a fall 2010 semester studio.

Planning prof leads students to win in Green Mobility Challenge

Graduate engineering students at Texas A&M advised by Ken Joh, assistant professor of urban planning, earned first place and $10,000 in scholarship money in a transportation planning contest sponsored by the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority.

In the contest, the Green Mobility Challenge, students were asked to recommend sustainable ways of constructing, operating and maintaining two proposed toll roads in Southwest Austin — the Oak Hill Expressway and the Manchaca Expressway.

Doctoral civil engineering students Lisa Larsen and Ben Sperry, masters’ civil engineering students Devin Moore, Scott Nelson and Jose Soto are enrolled in Joh’s fall 2011 public transportation class. The team also included Josh Rutenberg of Rice University. The team’s proposals won first place in the contests for both expressways.

Larsen and Nelson presented their team’s proposals at the awards event in Austin Nov. 15 before a panel of policymakers and transportation officials.

Among the students’ recommendations:

- moveable concrete barriers to change inbound-outbound lane assignments based on traffic patterns to ease congestion;
- inclusion of bike lanes and park and ride facilities;
- partnerships with property owners to create community parkland corridors and green spaces;
- sound absorbing walls, and
- using underpasses as canvases for local artists.
Students’ proposals win awards from Texas ASLA

A plan to transform an area of strip malls and parking lots in College Station into a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use downtown core is one of several projects by students at Texas A&M to win awards at the state’s most recent American Society of Landscape Architects chapter conventions.

The College Station design, which includes pedestrian-scaled city blocks, a mix of businesses and loft dwellings and two pedestrian-only areas, earned a merit award from the Texas chapter of the ASLA at its April 5-6, 2012 conference in Grapevine, Texas.

Designed by graduate students Cong Bian, Yuxi Cheng, Lingyan Miao, Jeffrey Slater, Qian Wan, Qingshu Wang and Wenjie Zhao in a summer 2011 studio led by Bruce Dvorak, assistant professor of landscape architecture, the plan also revitalizes and increases access to Wolf Pen Creek and removes pavement over a stream.

The students’ proposal covers an area bordered by Texas Avenue, Dominic Street, George Bush Drive East and Holleman Drive and includes a section of Harvey Road.

At the 2011 Texas ASLA conference, groundbreaking designs of educational butterfly gardens and a master plan-level environmental analysis of “green,” low-impact development techniques for a portion of the university campus earned awards.

Kristina Baldridge, Jennifer Berg and Brian Frederick won first place in the undergraduate general design category for a butterfly garden design that includes large sculptural elements representing stages of a butterfly’s life cycle and a pergola near the garden entrance to accommodate small gatherings.

Another butterfly garden design, created by undergraduates Kyle Pennington and P. Ashley Timmerman, captured general design honorable mention honors. This alternative, the students said, was specifically designed to promote the spirit of discovery through interaction and active learning.

A team of graduate students examining the potential benefits of ‘green’ development ideas for a large portion of Texas A&M’s campus that included green roof and vegetated wall surfaces captured honorable mention in the analysis and planning category.

The entry was prepared by Naishi Bu, James Montano, Prajakta Kedar, Xuemei Luo, Aaron Eaquito, Mark Swapp, Adam Nugent, Dizi Shi, Xin Yang, Alisa Dawson, Yosuke Tominaga and Yi Xue.

MUP students earn Texas APA award for Sealy studio project

A revitalization plan for Sealy, Texas’ downtown district, created by Texas A&M Master of Urban Planning students, won the 2011 Student Planning Award from the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association.

The students, led by Elise Bright, professor of urban planning, will accept the award at an Oct. 7 ceremony during the chapter’s annual conference in Austin.

“The awards program allows Texas APA to promote the work of planners in our state by recognizing exemplary work,” said chapter president Veronica Soto. The students’ work, she added, shows the value of planners and planning to communities and residents of the state.

Sealy city officials have used the students’ plan, which include guidelines for building facades and a consistent landscape design, lowering vehicle speeds, making the district more friendly to pedestrians and bicyclists and changing the town’s bus route, to guide its revitalization efforts, said Kim Meloneck, executive director of the Sealy Economic Development Corporation.

“From the beginning, the Texas A&M Sealy downtown study has been part of our city’s comprehensive plan,” she told the Sealy News in a June 23, 2011 article on the revitalization effort.

Landscape architecture students’ design of a downtown core for College Station won a merit award from the Texas Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The yearlong studio, Bright said, gives second-year MUP students a taste of the work-place through a “hands-on” planning experience. “It’s great for the students and I think it helps the communities a lot too,” she said.
Students led by Jon Rodiek, professor of landscape architecture, designed a series of recreational spaces in Spring, Texas. The project demonstrates the department's involvement in Education First, a university initiative that includes an effort to advance the public good through valuable contributions to the state.

Students’ parkland designs illustrate university’s Education First initiative

The July 13 dedication of a new park in Spring, Texas culminates a four-year, award-winning park system design project undertaken by Texas A&M landscape architecture students. The initiative, a valuable contribution to the state of Texas, also stands as a prime example of the myriad community outreach projects the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning has undertaken under the auspices of Texas A&M University’s Education First program, which encourages university contributions benefiting the citizens of Texas.

Herman Little Park, which includes a wetland observation deck, 5-acre fishing pond, a skateboarding park, a jogging and hiking path, a pavilion and parking for 20 cars, is part of an award-winning system of recreation spaces that students, led by Jon Rodiek, professor of landscape architecture, designed for the Timber Lane Utility Municipal District from 2005-2009.

“We combined these designs to create a master parks plan for the district,” said Bud Gessel, the district’s assistant secretary. “We have 179 acres of parkland and 8.25 miles of trails, 90 percent of which were designed by Rodiek’s students,” he said.

With the plans, the district was able to secure $4.4 million in state and federal funding for the series of parks and trails, located in a 100-year floodplain along the northern bank of Cypress Creek, adjacent to the Timber Lane subdivision in North Harris County about 25 miles north of downtown Houston.

“This was a fantastic project for the students and the utility district,” said Gessel.

The project, said Forster Ndubisi, head of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, is one example of the department’s fulfillment of Education First, one of the university’s major initiatives.

The initiative emphasizes the provision of solutions for modern challenges, such as health and economic development, through public service and innovation. The effort is guided by the university’s Vision 2020: Creating a Culture of Excellence, a road map pointing Texas A&M’s way to recognition as one of the U.S.’ 10 best public universities.

Projects like these in our department focus on the inseparable and interdependent mix of the University’s teaching, research and service/engagement missions,” said Ndubisi. “It’s using a ‘real-life’ project that benefits a community while forming the basis for learning and research.”

Rodiek’s students overcame special design challenges presented by the site.

“We had to respect where the flood line was,” said Rodiek, whose students created designs with flood lines provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. “The students’ designs also respect the native forest,” he said.

“There’s wildlife all over the place: hawks, all kinds of songbirds, small mammals and deer. The designs emphasized keeping wildlife in habitat areas while routing people away from those areas and respecting the native plants.”

“We tried to make our parks user-friendly, minimizing their exposure to walking parallel to the stream by identifying key access points to create perpendicular paths from the neighborhood to the park,” said Rodiek.

2012-2013 Scholarship Recipients: Department of Landscape Architecture & Urban Planning

- Gene Schrickel Jr. ’50 Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture: Pengzhi Li, Qingshu Wang and Wenyuan Ji.
- Robert F. & Florence H. White Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture: Lindsay Flesch
- ASLA Texas Chapter Scholarship: Bailey Brown
- TGB Partners/Robert Castro Memorial Award: Grant Jones
- Michael D. Murphy Endowed Scholarship: Edgar Jaimes
- Antonio F. Sarabando Jr. “Sprint of Place Award”: Elizabeth “Liz” Grasher
- Landscape Architecture Development Scholarships: Luis Hidalgo, Brad Sweitzer, Katherine Utecht, Xiaohan Gao and Wenjie Zhao
- Donald B. Austin Scholarship: Kendrick Yeh
- Samuel Garrett Endowed Scholarship: Katherine Enriquez
- Jesus Hinojosa Endowed Urban Planning Scholarship: Yuemi Park and Sara Hamidah
- Dr. Katherine F. Turnbull Scholarship: Stephany Caraballo
- David Pugh Outstanding MUP Student Award: Andi Sauls
- Jesus “Chuy” Hinojosa Academic Excellence Award: Mary Craighead, Kent Milson and Nick Oyler
- AICP Outstanding Student Award: Nick Oyler
- Master of Urban Planning Professional Advisory Council Excellence Endowed Scholarship: Jaimie Masterson
- Master of Science in Land Development Departmental Scholarship: Robert Santini, James Shawn Blackmon and Kriti Sharma
- Bachelor of Science in Urban & Regional Science Departmental Scholarship: Jolene Kollman, Amy Albright, Elizabeth Jaimes-Saucedo and Emily Bedford
- Urban and Regional Science Doctoral Departmental Scholarships: Jae Woong, Won Hye and Kyung Lee
- History Maker Homes Endowed Scholarships: Richard Odihambo, Minjie Xu and Amy Albright
- R. Joseph Reeves Memorial Scholarship: Saheum Hong and Michael Martin
- The Jeffrey T. ’78 and Shelley E. Potter ’78 Endowed Scholarship: Margaret Weber
- Phyllis K. and S.B. Haynes ’16 Endowed Scholarship: James Strain and Xiaokiao Cheng
- Department Head Prize: Kent Milson, Nick Oyler, Mary Craighead, Ryan Mikulanka and Bailey Brown.
- Department Head Honor Roll: Andy Sauls, Kerry Hao, Quincy Crow, John Curtis, Edward Tarlton and Junping Xu.
Two Master of Land and Property Development students at Texas A&M traveled to Chicago in July 2011 to document how Millennium Park, a $475 million project completed in 2004, praised as a “showcase of art and urban design” by the San Francisco Chronicle, has affected the vicinity’s real estate value.

Serena N. Conti and Ryan Mikulenga teamed with two graduate students from Chicago’s DePaul University to collect data and conduct interviews with a range of subjects including landowners, users of property around the park and users of the park itself to measure how the 24.5 acre space that includes a Frank Gehry-designed bandshell and four other major artistic highlights has impacted land prices.

They used a matrix developed by Dennis Jerke ’78 in his book “Urban Design and the Bottom Line: Optimizing the Return on Perception,” that includes four factors: social/cultural value, including safety and security, public access, transportation choices and context sensitivity; economic value, including taxable value, adjacent property values and occupancy rates; environmental value, including permeable surfaces, storm water management, rainwater harvesting; and carbon footprint and sensory or visual value, including green space, public art and water features.

Jerke, who holds a Master of Landscape Architecture degree from Texas A&M and is a former principal with TBG Partners, a landscape architecture and planning firm, was recently appointed as an adjunct professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at Texas A&M. He accompanied the students.

Conti earned a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree at California Polytechnic State University in May 2011 with concentrations in construction management and sustainable environments. She’s planning to enter academia after earning an MLPD degree, researching efficient construction and development processes.

Nick Oyler ’12 will spend nine months in the foundation’s professional development program, a transatlantic initiative aimed at developing new generations of U.S. leaders with firsthand knowledge of Europe.

“Nick’s training at the undergraduate and graduate level have prepared him to address complex, pressing issues that have environmental, economic and social consequences,” said Shannon Van Zandt, coordinator of the Master of Urban Planning program. “The fellowship will be very appropriate training for Nick and other young professionals who can influence decision-making in both public and private sector institutions.”

With placement assistance from the program, he anticipates working in Berlin at Germany’s Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development and in Bonn at Local Governments for Sustainability, a worldwide association of national, regional and local government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development.

Paula Lorente is completing the final phase of her Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Science program at Texas A&M as part of an inaugural group of Office of Graduate Studies dissertation fellows.

“The fellowship provides students with the opportunity to focus solely on the completion of their writing, which then allows our best and brightest graduate students to graduate from Texas A&M in a timely manner to begin the important work of positively impacting their communities,” said Karen Butler-Purry, associate provost for graduate studies.

Assisted by the fellowship, which includes a $15,000 stipend and up to $2,112 in health insurance reimbursements for doctoral students not supported on graduate research assistantships, Lorente is researching whether the creation of compact, mixed-use urban forms within cities will lead to flood losses less than or equal to lower-density urban areas.

“Professionals working with local governments on the planning and design of neighborhoods could use the results to formulate innovative planning policies and mechanisms to help create safe, secure and sustainable communities,” she said.

A Texas A&M scholarship recognizing leadership and service has been awarded to two students in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning.

In recognition of their leadership and service at Texas A&M University, Ed Tarlton, an Urban and Regional Sciences Ph.D. student, and Patrick Patterson, a Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Science Student Organization, the African American Professional Organization and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

During the 2011-2012 academic year Patterson was vice president of Future Leaders in Urban Planning, director of internal programming in the Memorial Student Center’s Woodson Black Awareness Committee and a member of CARPOOL, a student-operated, nonprofit organization that serves the Bryan/College Station community with free rides home at night and in the early morning hours Thursday through the weekend.

Southerland, the award’s namesake, retired in 2003 after a 10-year stint as vice president for student affairs, part of a 36-year career at Texas A&M.
Agreement sparks collaborations with schools in Beijing, Shanghai

Forster Ndubisi, head of Texas A&M's Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, and his counterparts at two leading Chinese universities have agreed to explore the possibility of academic exchanges between the two institutions by signing letters of cooperation during 2011 meetings in China.

Ndubisi, Xiong Li, dean of Beijing Forestry University's School of Landscape Architecture, Zilia Tang, head of Shanghai's Tongji University Department of Urban Planning, and Binyi Liu, head of Tongji University's Department of Landscape Studies, signed the letters indicating their institutions' interest in collaborating in areas including teaching and research, student enrollment, internships and field studies.

Ming-Han Li, associate professor of landscape architecture, who also made the trip, and Ndubisi presented their research at the two Chinese universities.

While in China, Ndubisi and Li also sought internship and training opportunities for students at Beijing's Tsinghua Urban Planning & Design Institute, a public/private entity associated with Tsinghua University that provides design and planning services.

Millennium Park

and educating visionary builders. Mikulenka earned an Urban and Regional Planning degree from Texas State University-San Marcos in 2006 and began the MLPD program after a stint as a planner with the City of Austin in the Planning and Development Review Department. He hopes to work in a large city doing infill development projects after learning how to plan and execute financially sound and successful redevelopment ventures.

“Building Millennium Park was a significant investment, but there was a major uplift in the value of the land and the activities it generated on the land around it,” said Geoffrey Booth, coordinator of the MLPD program. “As a driver for urban value creation it’s one of the most interesting projects in the country. It’s a best practice project that clearly has applications across the United States and across the world and therefore is relevant to us here in Texas.”

The park, perhaps the Windy City’s most important project since its World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, is the world’s largest rooftop garden, built atop a parking garage and commuter rail station.

Originally budgeted for $150 million, the city’s final construction bill was $270 million, with private donors providing the rest. A showcase for post-Modern architecture including a pavilion designed by Zaha Hadid and another Gehry design, the BP Pedestrian Bridge, the park is hailed by Frommer’s Travel Guide “as one of the four best free things to do in the city” and by the Financial Times as “a genuinely 21st-century interactive park that could trigger a new way of thinking about public outdoor spaces.”

The project was funded by Texas A&M’s College of Architecture and Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning and the Landscape Architecture Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that supports the preservation, improvement and enhancement of the environment.

Research findings and a video about the study were posted online and are used by MLPD students, he said.

Jerke and Suzanne Cannon, who chairs DePauw University’s Department of Real Estate, serve as members of the Urban Land Institute’s City Development Council, which facilitated the collaboration.

The Millennium Park study, said Booth, is an example of the MLPD program’s engagement with Education First, a strategic action plan headed by Karan Watson, Texas A&M provost and executive vice president for academic affairs.

“This is a project that’s obviously delivering a return to Texas citizens by looking at other best practice examples throughout the country that we can learn from,” he said. “We can apply those lessons here in the classroom and in the solutions we come up with for projects in Texas.”

Landscape architecture advisers visit Soltis Center in Costa Rica

Surrounded by a tropical rain forest and close to an active volcano, Texas A&M’s Soltis Center for Research and Education in Costa Rica could soon be hosting classes in landscape architecture. The recommendation came from the Texas A&M’s Landscape Architecture Professional Advisory Board whose members attended the center in January 2012 to complete a series of American Society of Landscape Architects continuing education courses.

“We saw many opportunities for class/curriculum considerations,” said Jim Manskey, board chairman. “We feel confident that many aspects of the landscape architecture curriculum can and should benefit from the facility and its environment.”

In addition to their own studies, the board learned about higher education opportunities at the center while sitting in on a mini-semester Design Process class led by Jorge Vanegas, dean of the College of Architecture.

They also met with Kim Soltis-Hammer, daughter and assistant to Bill Soltis ’55, who donated the land for the center, then built it at his own expense. Soltis earned a mechanical engineering degree at Texas A&M.

The ASLA courses conducted at the center and led by center director Eugenio Gonzalez included:
- A tour of the Finca Luna Nueva, a nearby sustainable farm;
- A lesson on how center designers and constructors resolved accessibility challenges building on a hilly rainforest site;
- An introduction to flora and fauna native to the Costa Rican rain forest; and
- A field trip to the nearby Arenal Volcano.

Landscape architecture advisory board members and their families tour the area surrounding the Arenal Volcano in Costa Rica, near the Soltis Center.
Honoring a 25-year career advancing the art and science of ecological design and planning as a nationally known scholar, educator, academic practitioner and administrator, Forster Ndubisi, head of Texas A&M’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, has been elevated to fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

“Ndubisi has forged a full and dedicated career that includes an unselfish excitement, each day, for the opportunity to impart the knowledge necessary in shaping the next generation of successful landscape architects,” said Margaret Robinson, president of the Texas ASLA chapter, in a nomination letter.

He stands for excellence in combining administrative accomplishments with an impressive level of scholarship productivity, said Jorge Vanegas, dean of Texas A&M’s College of Architecture. “Under his leadership, the department has benefited from a renaissance of collegiality, respect and trust in pursuit of learning and teaching, research, creative work and engagement excellence,” said Vanegas.

During his tenure as LAUP head, which began in 2004, its’ graduate and undergraduate landscape architecture programs have consistently been ranked among the top programs in the U.S. in annual rankings published by the Design Futures Council.

In the most recent rankings, announced in December 2011, the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree program tied with two other universities as third-best in the nation, while the Master of Landscape Architecture program tied in eighth place, fifth among public universities.

Among his numerous honors include the Outstanding Administrator Award from the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture in 2011.

Transportation expert to join LAUP planning faculty this fall

Transportation planning education at Texas A&M will be bolstered by the fall 2012 arrival of Wei Li, the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s newest faculty member.

Li was working as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of California, Irvine where he earned a Ph.D. in planning, policy and design. He also holds a Master of Arts in Planning from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada and a Bachelor of Business Administration from Renmin University in Beijing.

His research interests include transportation planning, environmental and health impacts of transportation, urban green infrastructure, valuation of environmental resources and externalities, microeconomics, applied econometrics, geographical information systems and sustainable development.

In his current research, Li is using subject survey and used global positioning systems to better understand how light rail transit infrastructure investments and the built environment impact travel behaviors and health.

Association of Former Students recognizes Varni’s research

For research that has helped improve the lives of children with chronic diseases throughout the world, James Varni, a professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at Texas A&M, earned The Association of Former Students’ 2011 Distinguished Achievement Award for Research.

Varni developed PedsQL, a quality of life measurement method used throughout the world, that can be performed by children as young as five with severe chronic conditions such as cerebral palsy and brain tumors.

“Before Dr. Varni’s clinical research, no quality of life measures existed for these children to voice their perspectives on their health and well being to their parents or the healthcare professions,” said Forster Ndubisi, head of the Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning Department.

In a five-year period following his 2004 arrival at Texas A&M, Varni authored and co-authored 96 peer-reviewed articles published in scholarly journals and was principal investigator or co-investigator on competitive research grants totaling more than $15 million.

“As a result of his stature in the field, he is constantly contacted by researchers from around the world, bringing further exposure to Texas A&M’s outstanding research enterprise,” said Ndubisi. “His contributions are exemplary and his work lays an important foundation for shaping the future of the department and its programs.”

Varni’s areas of expertise also include conceptual models and cognitive behavior therapy interventions in pediatric chronic health conditions. He has conducted research and evaluation projects focusing on the effects of the built and natural environment on child, parent and staff outcomes as a basis for evidence-based architectural design for pediatric healthcare facilities.

Varni earned a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of California-Los Angeles in 1976, a Master of Arts in Psychology from the University of California-Los Angeles in 1974 and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of California-Santa Barbara in 1972.

A Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Society of Behavioral Medicine and the Society of Pediatric Psychology, Varni has published more than 250 journal articles and book chapters in behavioral medicine and four books on children. He’s also a recipient of the Significant Research Contributions Award from the American Psychological Association.

Li elected to CELA leadership post, honored for service at conference

Ming-Han Li, associate professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M, was elected to a leadership position and honored for his service in the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture during the organization’s 2012 conference held last March at the University of Illinois.

CELA advocates for landscape architecture programs, provides a forum for dialogue about landscape architectural education and fosters and disseminates landscape architectural scholarship.

Li was chosen as CELA’s 2012-2014 vice president for research, a term that includes membership in the organization’s executive committee. He also received CELA’s Outstanding Communications Award, which recognizes landscape architecture educators who have coordinated abstract and paper reviews for CELA’s annual conferences since 2008.

Li, who joined the Texas A&M faculty in 2003, is interested in stormwater management, bioretention, soil erosion control, streambank bioengineering and sustainable landscape technology. He earned two degrees at Texas A&M, a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Science in 2002 and a Master of Landscape Architecture degree in 1998.

Stellar work earns president’s award for LAUP staffer Gottschalk

For cordially providing superlative service to students and faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, last spring Trisha Gottschalk, assistant to the department head, received a President’s Meritorious Service Award from Texas A&M University.

Those nominating her for this prestigious honor cited Gottschalk’s integrity, readiness, consummate mastery of complex administrative tasks and unique ability to anticipate the needs of others.

“Trisha always goes beyond her responsibilities,” said Forster Ndubisi, head of the department. “Upon completion of her projects, duties and areas of responsibilities, she always foresees the next step and is ready to proceed prior to my inquiry, often asking if she can assist with completing other areas of need.”

Gottschalk’s excellent management of the department’s promotion and tenure process for junior faculty was also cited.
Two of the nine former students recognized this year by Texas A&M’s College of Architecture as outstanding alumni have distinguished themselves in lengthy careers in landscape architecture: Cleveland Turner ’73, by elevating the status of the profession, and Michael Murphy ’61, by educating future professionals since 1969.

Turner, a founding principal of Turner Land Architecture in Amarillo, Texas, has led state and national efforts to bolster licensing and legal registration requirements of landscape architects throughout his five-decade career.

“Few of our former students have exemplified the consistent, recognized leadership and commitment to the profession as Cleve has done in landscape architecture,” said Tom Woodfin, a former associate professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M.

As a member of the Texas chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Turner led a drive to add landscape architects to Texas’ Professional Services Procurement Act, a list of professions hired by state agencies for professional consulting. “Their inclusion in the PSPA has been critical, making the profession more accessible,” Turner said.

Murphy has also been a leader in internationalizing landscape architecture education, said Manskey.

Murphy joined the Texas A&M faculty in 1969 after earning a Master of Landscape Architecture degree at the University of California, Berkeley. He earned a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree at Texas A&M in 1966 and a Bachelor of Science in Range Science degree at Texas A&M in 1961.

He was already integrating biophysical and human behavioral considerations in design studios in 1972, when landscape architecture was regarded primarily as an art, said Jim Manskey, ’79, one of Murphy’s former students and principal at TBG Partners, a landscape architecture and planning firm.

As a result of his research, said Manskey, Murphy developed methodologies emphasizing design decision making based on the application of evidence-based knowledge, emphasizing landscapes as process, rather than the traditional view of landscapes as places.

“When many of us, his former students, graduated and engaged in professional practice we learned to deeply appreciate his long-lasting influence on our professional lives by his consistently seeking higher standards from students through his thorough knowledge of landscape architecture,” said Manskey.

Murphy has also been a leader in internationalizing landscape architecture education, said Manskey.