Texas A&M landscape architecture programs ranked among best in U.S.

The graduate and undergraduate programs in landscape architecture at Texas A&M University are ranked among the nation's best in the 2009 edition of "America's Best Architecture & Design Schools," a list compiled annually by the Design Futures Council, publishers of the bi-monthly DesignIntelligence newsletter.

This year, the Master of Landscape Architecture program ranked fourth and the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture placed fifth in the annual nationwide survey which asks academic and industry leaders which accredited professional programs best prepare students for today's and tomorrow's real-world practice.

The 2009 rankings mark a steady upward march for the Texas A&M landscape architecture programs. The BLA program placed 11th in the 2006 DesignIntelligence rankings, then 10th in 2007, and sixth in 2008, before tying at fifth with Cornell University this year. Similarly, the MLA program moved from 12th place in 2006, then slipped to 13th place in 2007 before jumping up to seventh place in 2008 and finishing fourth this year.

“Clearly, the rankings are a reflection of the relentless dedication of our talented faculty and students, implementation of a strong curriculum, substantial investments in technology, and sustained efforts of the department and college to provide the best learning experiences for our students,” said Forster Ndubisi, head of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning at Texas A&M. The publication also placed the preparedness of A&M landscape architecture graduates on top in five vital skill areas, including a first place finish in the "analysis and planning" categories, second place in "computer applications," third place in "research and theory," fourth place in "design," and fifth place in "sustainable design practices and principles."

Urban and Regional Science undergrads earn degrees

City of Bryan honors capstone students

The first graduates of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning's new Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Science program earned their degree this spring.

Highlighting their final semester, the three graduating seniors, Philip Colwell, Chris Abrams, and Brent Elliott, participated in a capstone course in which they developed educational materials on stormwater-related issues for the city of Bryan, Texas. The students, their classmates, and instructor Carla Prater were honored for their efforts at the April 28 meeting of the Bryan City Council.

The BS-URS program emphasizes problem solving, communication skills, and critical thinking to create communities that are healthy, efficient, accessible, and resilient. According to program coordinator Don Sweeney, associate professor of urban planning, the program is designed to enable students "to have the skills that can be applied to solving real-world problems."
FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

Department defines five priority research areas

BY FORSTER NDUBISI
Department Head
Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning

The 2008-09 academic year was very busy as we continued to strengthen the quality of our academic, research and engagement programs, while creating new ones as opportunities arose.

At the university level, Dr. Elsa Murano, president of Texas A&M, implemented a number of initiatives that continue to position the university to become a consensus top ten public university in the United States by 2020. One major initiative is the development and near completion of the university's academic plan under the leadership of our new provost, Dr. Jeffrey Vitter. The plan defined three major areas of focus, "roadmaps" for research, teaching and engagement, and was developed with extensive participation of faculty, staff, and students. Each college also developed a research plan that served as input into the academic planning process.

The department articulated five priority research areas that were integrated into the College of Architecture's Ten Year Research plan, which was completed in December 2008. These research areas are:
- Community management of natural and human-induced hazards;
- Sustainability of human and natural eco-systems;
- Social and economic viability of neighborhoods and communities;
- Healthy neighborhoods and cities; and
- Transportation mobility, safety, access, and physical forms.

All five are areas in which our faculty have collectively demonstrated distinguishing excellence. Department faculty have almost $7 million in ongoing research grants and contracts within these areas of specialization. In short, our funded research program is very solid through the continuation of current and new research.

The department has witnessed impressive increases in both the quality and number of students entering its academic programs. Approximately 360 students enrolled in the 2008-09 academic year and about 400 students are expected in September 2009. The number of graduate program applications submitted for fall 2009 is considerably higher than any of the past five years, which enables the department to be much more selective in its admissions.

Our Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA) and Master of Landscape Architecture programs ranked fifth and fourth respectively, in DesignIntelligence's annual publication "America's Best Architecture and Design Schools 2009." In the skills and knowledge categories, Texas A&M landscape architecture programs ranked first in planning and analysis, second in computer applications, third in research, fourth in design, and fifth in sustainability. Additionally, the publication named Dr. Michael Murphy and myself among the 25 most admired educators in the nation. This was the second year in a row that Dr. Murphy was so honored.

In March 2009, a three-person accreditation team conducted a site visit for the BLA program. The team's preliminary report indicated that all 10 accreditation standards were met. The final report from the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board is expected in late summer or early fall. Additionally, I am pleased to announce our first cohort of three students in the Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Sciences program graduated in May 2009. You may recall that this program was initiated in September 2007. We expect the next cohort to graduate in December. There are 51 students enrolled in the program; enrollment is expected to expand to 100 by September 2009. I am very excited about the quality of the students who are pursuing this degree.

Our new interdisciplinary Graduate Certifi-

See "Dept. head report," Page 12

First BS-URS class receives degrees

Continued from Page 1

and knowledge to make a difference."

This fall, Colwell will begin pursuing a Master of Architecture degree at the University of Texas at Arlington. Elliott is spending the summer as an intern for the city of Bryan's Planning Services Department and will begin the graduate program in land development at Texas A&M in August. Abrams is still exploring his options on the job market. At least four more BS-URS students are expected to receive their diplomas in December 2009.

These first three BS-URS students worked through the challenges and uncertainties of a fledgling program, noted Sherry Bame, an associate professor of urban planning who played a integral role in the program's development. "You're the first," she told the graduates. "You're going to have to make your own way. I'm so glad you guys decided to do it."

Though initial expectations for program's growth were modest, interest has exceeded forecasts. More than 50 new BS-URS students are anticipated this fall.
ENGAGING TEXAS

HRRC develops Coastal Communities Planning Atlas

Web-based planning tool assists growth management along Texas coastline

The Coastal Communities Planning Atlas, developed by the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center of Texas A&M University’s College of Architecture, is a new Internet tool designed to provide images of possible futures of coastal areas in Texas.

“We wanted to create a Web-based, visual spatial decision support tool, where anybody with an internet connection, whether you’re a mayor, planner, or resident on the coast, can view, interact with data and predict impacts of development on coastal areas,” said Sam Brody, associate professor of urban planning at Texas A&M and a faculty fellow with the Hazards Reduction and Recovery Center.

Visitors to the site, http://coastalatlas.tamu.edu/, can drop one or many of the atlas’ 75 information layers (counties, deep all along the Texas coast, or pinpoint a spot by zooming in to a specific location. The HRRC gathered data sets such as hurricane storm surge zones, property values, elevation, dams, wetland permits and many more.

“We’ve got interdisciplinary sets of data for all these different layers,” said Brody. “It lets you look at multiple layers of information at the same time and interact with it.”

The Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center worked with many partners for the atlas, including the Department of Oceanography at Texas A&M. “We worked with them to create a really detailed, coastal topography data set,” said Brody.

The atlas’ customization is so thorough users can even upload their own data and include it with existing data.

“I’m really proud of the way it’s turned out,” said Brody.

The atlas is an outgrowth of the Texas Sustainable Coastal Initiative, an interdisciplinary project supported by funds from various agencies including NOAA, the Texas General Land Office and NOAA’s Coastal Services Center. The initiative brings together partners from various research groups and institutions with the common goal of guiding and managing the growth along the Texas coast in a sustainable and equitable manner.

According to the Costal Atlas website, in the “later phase of the project, users will be able to query data and create a custom map based on multiple development scenarios. Communities can use this educational tool to guide future decisions on growth in a sustainable manner such that the need for economic development is balanced with priorities associated with environmental protection and human health, safety, and welfare. The system will also help address important research questions related to where future growth will occur in Texas’ coastal zones, the impact of this growth, and the usefulness of Web GIS in facilitating sustainable planning.

PCO provides design, planning expertise for Texas

The Department of Landscape Architecture & Urban Planning has a long history of engaging with small and mid-sized Texas towns to tackle design and planning problems right in their own communities. Most recently, the department’s outreach efforts have been codified in the new Partnership for Community Outreach. Aimed at coordinating service and outreach activities within the department and beyond, the PCO committee solicits requests from smaller cities that don’t have the staff or resources to hire consultants, and matches them with classes or individual students to help create solutions to problems ranging from designing a new entrance monument to assessing livability.

Projects undertaken during the 2009-09 school year have included a landscape plan for Alton, Texas, undertaken by Tom Woodfin’s class; the design of a new downtown entrance for Bryan, Texas, created by Jody Naderi’s studio; and the creation of a strategic plan for redevelopment of a commercial area in Cuero, Texas, proposed by Elise Bright’s applied planning course.

The program provides an organizational framework leveraging LAUP’s capacity to systematically apply, disseminate, and validate knowledge about functional, healthy, and sustainable human environments. Its primary goal is to systematically link teaching to service and community-based research, thus enriching student learning experiences through the application of knowledge while improving the quality of life through the built and natural environment.

The program focuses on three key initiatives. First among them, “Service Learning Partnerships,” which include the ongoing Target Texas community service program, as well as ad hoc projects conducted by various classes. These learning partnership projects are community-based teaching and research projects that provide research, preliminary planning and design studies for communities and groups who would otherwise be unable to afford professional services.

The second PCO initiative, “Continuing Education,” includes distance education and onsite seminars aimed at improving the department’s ability to bring contemporary research findings directly to audiences such as professional organizations and local communities.

The third PCO component, “Outreach Aca-
Students document post-Ike recovery efforts

Researchers from Texas A&M’s Hazard Research and Recovery Center spent some of this year’s winter break braving snow, giant mosquitoes and a devastated gulf coast landscape to compile a first hand account of the aftermath of Hurricane Ike and recovery efforts in its wake.

Eighteen Aggie graduate students, 11 from College Station and seven from A&M’s Galveston campus, fanned out across the Galveston/Bolivar Peninsula area, collecting visual damage assessments and detailed surveys of residents to assess property damage and household decision-making related to Ike recovery efforts.

The project sought to determine whether existing development patterns and spatial distribution of vulnerable populations affected the damage and loss of property brought by the storm. Researchers also looked into whether social vulnerability factors facilitated or impeded decision-making pertaining to dislocation and early rebuilding decisions.

It was funded by a $145,671 National Science Foundation quick-turnaround program grant that allows researchers to go out into the field and quickly collect fleeting data, said Shannon Van Zandt, principal investigator for the project and assistant professor of urban planning.

“We visited every house twice, and most of them three times, to see if we could find somebody home,” said Van Zandt, who led the project with co-investigator Wesley Highfield.

In the surveys, researchers asked residents about Hurricane Ike’s impact on their residence and what repair and recovery measures they took.

“We’re also trying to determine if they’re living in the house they were in when the storm hit, or if they’re having to rent another unit somewhere while they’re working on their house,” Van Zandt said.

The weather had a big surprise in store for researchers.

“The first day we were out there it snowed,” Van Zandt said. “That was a real problem, particularly on Bolivar Island, where the streets are gone and it’s too muddy to be out there without a four-wheel drive once it gets wet.”

Packs of giant, swarming mosquitoes were also a problem. The bugs tormented researchers as soon as they opened their car doors.

The Bolivar peninsula, which was devastated by Ike, provided special research challenges.

“On the Bolivar peninsula the streets are gone, the street signs are gone, so many of the houses are gone, it’s really difficult to find an address,” said Van Zandt. “For those areas we knew we were going to have difficulty finding, the students took computers equipped with geographic information system software so they could look at the mapping and aerial photography and identify where they were.”

Despite the hardships, students were able to complete more than 300 household surveys and 1,500 damage assessments. The data will provide models of the impact on urban development and social vulnerability on community resilience to natural hazards and serve as a baseline for future study of community recovery.

The data will ultimately be combined with databases for the Galveston County Appraisal District and Texas A&M’s Texas Coastal Community Planning Atlas, which was developed by the center and went online in 2008.

“Shannon did an incredible job mobilizing the students and faculty members to do the damage assessments,” said Brody, the HRRC director. Without her leadership, we would never have collected as much data as we did. Her damage assessments and household interviews will set the baseline for determining the degree of property damage on Galveston Island cause by Hurricane Ike.”

“The ability to capture initial damage assessments should provide the basis for a longitudinal database which will continue to generate a better understanding of the relationship between community resilience and recovery,” Van Zandt said in the project’s abstract.
Bame leading 3-year study of needs caused by 2005 hurricanes

Texas A&M Urban planning professor Sherry Bame is directing a $750,000 study to use the Texas 211 system to identify needs that went unmet during hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In the first year of the project, 13 students have worked to code about 50,000 hand-written call records and 800,000 electronic records taken by staff at the 211 area information centers in the fall of 2005.

Researchers will then spend next year analyzing the types of unmet needs over time and location.

The third year of the project will be spent implementing a standard data collection protocol for disasters. The protocol will enable 211 programs to provide community leaders and researchers with a "gold mine" of information to improve disaster preparedness, management and recovery.

Researchers have identified needs for food, housing, clothing and transportation. Callers have also needed financial, health and legal advice.

Calls requesting help for both disaster victims and host communities are included — as well as baseline data to compare to types and volume of unmet needs throughout the phases of disaster.

The findings will portray patterns in time and by locale of unmet need types.

The 211 system is a nationwide program similar to 911 that provides information and referral for non-emergency needs.

The students working on the project are undergraduates Robyn Bell, Dayna Finley, Alexandria Norman and Ashley Shaw; graduate students Tasha Davis, Aatmaja Desai, Andrew Garza, Erin Harrison and Courtney Payne; and doctorate students Rhonda Dunn, Aha Grover, Tiffany Kleb and Jee Young Lee.

Dr. Doug Wunnepenger, a research professor of urban planning, and Kay Parker, vice president of the United Way, are also participating.

Research eyes factors encouraging, impeding children’s walks to school

Chanam Lee, assistant professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M's College of Architecture, has secured a three-year, $252,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to research how patterns in children's walking to school are affected by changes in a school's surroundings.

Lee's research project, "The 'Whys' and 'Why Nots' of Active Living: Barriers and Motivators among High Risk Children," will track the changes in student walking patterns following sidewalk, street crossing, and other improvements around 11 elementary schools in the Austin Independent School District. The grant is from the foundation's Active Living Research program.

"Most of the schools selected for the study are in lower income areas with a large minority population, and had already received the funding to make those environmental changes," said Lee.

The schools, she said, received funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School program, which provides funds for a variety of programs and projects designed to encourage children to safely walk or ride a bicycle to school.

Lee and her research team will conduct surveys and have students wear a wristwatch-type global positioning system unit to plot their

See “Study eyes kids’ walking patterns,” Page 6
Urban planning professors investigate lost transportation funds

Because Texas is facing a transportation infrastructure funding crisis, the state is losing funds that could be used to finance transportation improvements. To determine the degree of this loss, three urban planning professors at Texas A&M are launching an 18-month study in June.

Were the state to establish regional mobility authorities (RMAs), the researchers suggest it could capture additional tax money derived from the rise in property values in areas where transportation infrastructure improvement occur, then reinvest the funds in transportation.

"Various reasons can prevent the establishment of RMAs, and we're going to measure how much money could have been captured if an RMA had been started earlier," said Jesse Saginor, assistant professor of urban planning, who is conducting the study with Eric Dumbaugh, assistant professor of urban planning and David Ellis, visiting associate professor of urban planning.

"Some areas may have newer infrastructure not yet needing significant maintenance, or it takes time for everyone to agree on a plan," said Saginor. "From an opposition standpoint, many people are against tolls and/or additional forms of geographic-based governance."

An RMA, he said, is usually the size of one county and often more, since transportation is largely a regional issue.

In the study, Dumbaugh, Ellis and Saginor will identify the magnitude of property value increases associated with transportation infrastructure improvements by comparing property values in areas that recently underwent significant transportation infrastructure improvements against nearby control groups.

"Most cities have to do a special bond issue for transportation improvements, but with an RMA you can set up a budget and have an ongoing fund as opposed to having a special election every time you have a transportation construction project," said Saginor.

Study eyes kids' walking patterns

Continued from Page 5

walking patterns before, during, and after the improvements at their school.

"We're going to be able to keep track of where students go as part of their daily or weekly routine, which route they take to get to school, and whether they walk, bike, or are driven to school," she said.

In addition to unsafe crossings and poor sidewalk conditions, the barriers her study's title refers to can also be a school district's administrative line; the larger a school's boundary area, the farther a potential student walker has to travel. Some schools, she said, have a highway running through their attendance areas.

Lee's research team is also trying to determine how different or similar barriers and motivators are for different groups of children. Their research focuses on various high-risk groups based on race/acculturation, income, gender, health care access and transportation mobility. The team hopes to reveal underlying disparities in environmental conditions where high versus low risk children live, study and play.

Lee said walking to school can help young people establish a lifelong habit of active and healthy lifestyles, but that current environmental conditions around home and school often are not safe or attractive for walking. Lee said her research recognizes that many school-aged children are exposed to health and safety risks, demonstrated by high rates of obesity, asthma, and injuries from crashes.

"Another component of the study is what we call virtual experiments, using photo simulation," said Lee.

Subjects will be shown initial images of streets, playgrounds and parks, then subsequent images with different environmental features such as more trees, more benches, more lighting, and different design features.

The topic is of interest to Lee because of her belief that the design of the built environment is related to the health of people and the environment.

"I'm tackling two very important issues in our society, the sedentary lifestyle and automobile dependency, both of which are devastating for humans and the environment," said Lee. "Our addiction to the automobile, a major reason why we don't move our bodies enough, is to blame for many environmental problems that we currently face, such as air pollution, global warming and energy consumption, to name a few. Among the many ways to address these problems, I am interested in approaching it from the way we plan, design and build our cities and communities."

Lee's research team includes Dan Sui, professor of geography and a Faculty Fellow at the College of Architecture's Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, Xuejui Zhu, assistant professor of architecture, and James Varni, professor of landscape architecture and urban planning and pediatrics.
Cape Lookout National Seashore is a 56-mile system of barrier islands in North Carolina.

Urban planners creating storm recovery plan for North Carolina's Cape Lookout National Seashore

Texas A&M researchers are taking a natural and cultural resource-focused approach in the development of a storm recovery plan for the Cape Lookout National Seashore, a 56-mile system of barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina.

The plan, created by Eric Bardenhagen, an urban and regional sciences doctoral student, and George Rogers, professor of urban planning, will provide short-, medium- and long-term guidance for recovery efforts to be used at Cape Lookout in the critical period immediately following a damaging storm.

The plan is needed, Bardenhagen said, because hurricanes and other damaging storms pose a constant threat to coastal parks. However, many of the natural and coastal resources that make up these parks, he said, have differing recovery needs.

"The resources are difficult to value in monetary terms," said Bardenhagen, "but are important because they provide multiple forms of value to visitors and members of the surrounding community."

The plan will establish priority resource lists to guide post-storm recovery efforts. A web-based valuation survey is being used to inform guidance, enabling recovery efforts to focus on resources that hold significant importance to five dimensions affecting the visitor experience at Cape Lookout.

This plan is the first of its kind within the National Park Service and it is intended that the lessons learned from this process will lead to a successful methodology for use in other coastal parks and facilities.

Researchers eye effectiveness of 24 Texas rural transit plans

Faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning have partnered with the Texas Transportation Institute to study the effectiveness and impact of coordinated transit and human services plans in 24 rural regions in Texas.

The plans were recently adopted in response to changes in federal requirements for rural transit planning.

Working with a $100,000 grant from the TTI's University Transportation Center for Mobility, the investigators will use grounded theory methods and detailed interviews with regional decision makers and stakeholders to identify the effectiveness of frameworks, planning processes and outcomes of the various regions' transit service plans.

In addition to examining the plans' impact in rural economies, researchers will also identify unique or innovative cost-cutting strategies, as well as challenges, opportunities and best practices for coordinating rural transit services.

June Martin, assistant director of the Center for Housing and Urban Development and senior urban planning lecturer, will lead the project with co-principal investigators Eric Dumbaugh and Cecilia Giusti, assistant professors of urban planning, and Linda Cherrington, TTI program manager.

PCO aids Texas towns

Continued from Page 3

democracy," was created to document, publish and archive projects for future reference and publicity. Because documentation of most community outreach initiatives is usually inappropriate for publication in professional journals, the goal of the Outreach Academy is to produce more accessible documents through a technical monograph series or service bulletins intended for a professional rather than an academic audience. Additionally, the Outreach Academy will sponsor lectures and seminars to enhance institutional connections with Texas A&M research centers.

The PCO's goal is to advance outreach initiatives in support of the university's mission of discovery, teaching, and outreach. For LAUP, the program provides an opportunity to advance the scholarship of disciplinary integration through collaborative knowledge creation and application throughout the department, college and university.

Michael Neuman and Elise Bright, professors of urban planning, recently conducted research that shows a great deal of careful planning will be needed to deal with booming population growth in the area of Texas known as the Texas Urban Triangle over the next 20 years.

The professors and graduate students conducted the study, which led to a 140-page report, "Texas Urban Triangle: Framework for Future Growth." They researched key strategic factors shaping the future growth of the mega-region, including current and future needs for water, energy, housing, education, transportation, and other infrastructure.

"The Texas Urban Triangle is the urban mega-region bound by Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio, and it has become one of the most relevant areas in the world," said Neuman at the meeting at Texas A&M's Gilchrist Building.

"With 17 million people living in this region, it's the largest populated area of Texas," he said, adding that by 2030, the Texas Urban Triangle could swell to 25 million residents.

The report can be accessed at http://sustainableurbanism.tamu.edu/projects.html; a video of their presentation is available at http://utcm.tamu.edu/colloquium/last_colloq.htm.
TEACHING & LEARNING

LAUP partnership with Beaumont thrives as students present revitalization plans

Since Hurricane Rita dealt a blow to Beaumont in September 2005, students from Texas A&M’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning have helped the city recover with plans to renovate and revitalize neighborhoods and housing while fulfilling an important university initiative, said Forster Ndubisi, head of the department.

“Our collaboration with the city of Beaumont is a perfect example of the scholarship of engagement as outlined in the university’s academic master plan,” he said.

In the plan, Jeffrey S. Vitter, provost and executive vice-president for academics, calls for engagement, defined as collaborative partnerships between Texas A&M and entities that build upon the university’s strengths in research and education.

Most recently, Beaumont city leaders have begun implementing ideas presented in December 2008 by graduate and undergraduate urban planning students in an effort to revitalize the city’s North End neighborhood with a $20 million federal grant.

“Some ideas from the 90-minute presentation,” wrote Dee Dixon of the Beaumont Enterprise, “were the need for improvements to Beaumont Municipal Transit, a localization of social services and small business management education.” Dixon’s article about the meeting between the students and city and community leaders appeared in the Beaumont Enterprise in its Dec. 3, 2008 edition.

In spring 2006, landscape architecture students led by Nancy Volkman, associate professor of landscape architecture, created a design concept for the revitalization of Magnolia Gardens, a housing project that had been damaged by the hurricane.

Students in Shannon Van Zandt’s Neighborhood Revitalization class and Cecilia Guist’s Urban and Regional Economic Development class also traveled to Beaumont after Rita, reviewing site plans and discussing options for bringing investment and economic development to the beleaguered Magnolia Gardens area.

Land development student participates in ULI international urban design competition

Michael Miller, a first-year graduate student in Texas A&M University’s land development program, teamed up this spring with two fellow Aggies in the real estate program and two architecture students from the University of Houston to develop an entry for the seventh annual ULI (Urban Land Institute) Gerald D. Hines Student Urban Design Competition.

The students presented schemes portraying them as single-entity owners of the Denver Design District (DDD), a valuable midtown parcel comprised of three properties among roughly 75 acres just 1.5 miles south of downtown Denver, Colo.

While the DDD boasts an impressive tenant roster, and is the largest to-the-trade design center in an eight-state region, its built environment resembles a typical suburban power center. Based on the assumption that the DDD parcel has ample potential for a higher and better use, the competition charged the teams with redeveloping the entire 75-acre site and creating a landmark, transformative mixed-use community without losing the current, valuable roster of tenants.

According to Miller, his team’s entry, “Urban Emergence,” denoted the process by which a decidedly unsustainable “power center” is transformed into a cultural epicenter.

An added sustainability challenge — new to the 2009 competition — was a connection to ULI’s initiative, “The City in 2050: Creating Blueprints for Change.” This project posits a vision of the future replete with massive demographic, climate, and financial changes that likely will alter the built environment. While adhering to the typical challenge involving financial and urban design components, teams were also challenged to consider their redevelopment of the DDD in the context of 2050 and how their plans would allow the DDD to thrive in 2050 and beyond.

The annual graduate-level competition is intended to provide an interdisciplinary learning experience for real estate and design students in the United States and Canada.

Students’ park design earning more awards, benefiting community

The awards keep rolling in for a parkland design near Spring, Texas by graduate and undergraduate students led by Jon Rodiek, professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M’s College of Architecture.

The Cypress Creek Hike and Bike Trail, located in 160 acres of parkland operated by the Timber Lane Utility District, as recognized last March by the Houston-Galveston Area Council as the “Best Park and Natural Area Project under $500,000.”

The parkland, designed by students in three studios led by Jon Rodiek beginning in 2005, is primarily on public land located along the northern bank of Cypress Creek adjacent to the Timber Lane subdivision in North Harris County, about 25 miles from downtown Houston.

In 2007, the park master plan earned the council’s “Best of the Best” award for park and trail planning.

Due in part to the master park plan developed by Rodiek’s landscape architecture students, the utility district received $4.4 million in state and federal grants to help fund construction projects in the district’s four parks.

“The planning they did was a critical part of the grant process,” said Bud Gessell, a board member of the Timber Lane Utility District, adding that the district had used the park’s master plan to apply for several other grants.

Construction began last October on paved trails, restrooms and parking areas in Sandpiper Park. In another park location, a bridge across Cypress Creek and a paved trail are also being built.

The utility district funded the students’ efforts, which included trips to the area, a site inventory, soil testing, water quality analysis, plant identification and soil examination.

“We did all that in studio just like a real office,” said Rodiek. “We rented vans and drove down there and back countless times.”
Expert leads students on pedestrian audit of campus area

Dan Burden, executive director of Walkable Communities, a non-profit organization seeking to promote walkability as the cornerstone of a successful, vibrant community, pointed out successes and short-comings of the Texas A&M campus and adjoining streets to students who joined him on a stormy March 31 for a pedestrian audit hosted by Texas A&M's College of Architecture.

Burden's visit, which included an afternoon lecture, was the inaugural event in an ongoing symposium that's part of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning's new interdisciplinary Graduate Certificate in Transportation Planning.

Burden walked to the Langford Architecture Center from his room at the Hampton Inn, located on Texas Avenue just north of its intersection with University Avenue; he didn’t think much of the journey's pedestrian experience.

"Coming over here, I would rate all the walking conditions from an F-minus to maybe a C-minus," he told a group in the Langford A atrium that had assembled for the audit. "There are no good walking experiences between the two points."

"It's not just the lack of sidewalks," he said. "There's no shade, the buildings are not oriented correctly; they're suburban in form. Suburbs don't work for walking."

He took the group south on Ross Street from the Langford Architecture Center as lightning flashed, thunder roared and chills, gusty winds buffeted the walkers.

"We've never had an audit canceled due to weather," said Burden, unshaken by the threatening conditions as he unspooled his tape measure to gauge Ross Street's width.

"I would call this immensely walkable," said Burden as the group stopped at the intersection of Ross and Spence streets, the weather continuing its threatening ways. "It's not the highest on the scale," he said, but he commended the canopy of trees, the parking on both sides of the sidewalk and streets.

Burden then led the group north on Spence Street and was talking about the benefits of 90-degree street parking when pea-sized hail began to pound them; the walkers fled to one of the engineering buildings on Spence Street to wait out the storm.

He then led the group to the Northgate area, starting at the busy intersection of Spence Street and University Avenue, evaluating the streets' widths, sidewalk lengths, signage, signal light patterns — everything a pedestrian or bicyclist encounters at the intersection.

Burden was not impressed by University Avenue as he and the group walked west through the Northgate area.

As thunder boomed and lightning flashed, Dan Burden, director of Walkable Communities, pressed on with a walkability audit of campus area streets.

"When I look at this road, I cannot imagine why you have more lanes than you need," he said of the six-lane road bisected by a left-turn lane. "There are dozens of examples throughout North America where four-lane roads are outperforming this road night and day because they put a lot of design thought into every intersection," he said.

He noted there were long stretches of time where there weren't any moving cars on the street.

"The cars are just waiting for a long traffic light cycle that shouldn't be that long," he said. "By following some of the conventional engineering practices of the past, we're actually dampening the ability of this road to do what it was designed to do," he said.

Later in the day, Burden presented "Considering Urban Transportation in the 21st Century: How Contemporary Economic, Demographic, and Housing Trends will Influence the Design of Our Communities and Transportation Systems" at the Wright Gallery in Langford A.

Walkable Communities, in partnership with Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Inc., a planning, urban design, transportation, landscape architecture and environmental services firm, aims to help large and small cities, neighborhoods and school districts to improve their walking conditions.

Student team tackles ACSA's Green Community Challenge

A multidisciplinary student team sponsored by Sustainable Transportation instructor Eric Dumbaugh has been rethinking green design in the context of the Bryan-College Station community while developing an entry for an international student design competition sponsored by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

The Green Community International Student Design Competition challenges students to "plan, design, and construct the world between..."

See "Students tackle Green Challenge," Page 12
Design charrettes highlight Aggie Workshop ’09

Luminary speakers, design charrettes and roundtable discussions highlighted Aggie Workshop 2009, the annual three-day conference organized and hosted by the Texas A&M student chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The 2009 Aggie Workshop, held Feb. 19-21 at the Langford Architecture Center, marked the 34th consecutive year for the event.

David Yocca, a principal with the Conservation Design Forum, an Elmhurst, Ill. firm specializing in integrated water-based ecological design, delivered the keynote address.

He discussed fundamental ecological design principles, historic ecosystems, and how they worked before the arrival of Europeans in the West, as well as the impact of conventional design practices and why they're unsustainable.

Yocca also stressed the importance of “green” practices and offered numerous examples of design and preservation projects his firm had completed.

"We are a team of landscape architects, planners and water resource engineers, but we're always in collaboration with architects, planners, engineers, sociologists, and a whole host of others," he said, "whoever can bring essential perspective to whatever a design problem is about."

The fundamental, founding principle behind the Conservation Design Forum, Yocca said, comes from recognizing that "high quality, diverse, stable landscape systems, are valuable, irreplaceable, and when they are discovered, need to be identified, protected, restored and nurtured."

In addition to attending lectures, the 2009 Aggie Workshop attendees participated in a design charrette led by landscape architecture professionals, as well as a graphic design workshop led by John Moon, an illustrator/designer at TBG Partners.

Two roundtable discussions, one consisting of Texas A&M landscape architecture program former students, and another featuring veteran landscape architects, closed out the three-day workshop.

"This year’s event explored what landscape architects have accomplished, are accomplishing and aspiring towards, and revealed innovative ideas and career paths," said Kelli Ivy, chair of the ASLA Workshop committee.

The workshop theme, “Arising Forefronts: Are We Prepared?” responded to the continual change in the world's natural and designed elements.

"Through well-planned, sensitive design and construction processes, we can accommodate the growing human population and still conserve and sustain the natural environments and integrity of the land," she said.

Top disaster researchers help mark HRRC’s 20th year

On Saturday, Jan. 31, the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center hosted a daylong public workshop, "Resilience in the 21st Century," featuring presentations by some of the nation’s leading hazard researchers, including Phil Berke of the University of North Carolina, Betty Hearn Morrow of Florida International University, and Steve French of Georgia Tech.

Since its inception, the center’s research has contributed to new insights about resilience, or the capacity to avoid, absorb or recover from disaster or catastrophe, through its research of conditions before, during and after such events.

“When natural hazards were considered acts of God, it was only natural to respond to hazard losses with reactive measures, but now that the human role in natural hazards is illuminated, resilience is one of the most important mechanisms available to proactively promote community well-being before, during and after disaster strikes," said Brody.

To conclude the workshop, center founders Dennis Wanger and Phil Berke, now of the University of North Carolina, reminisced about the origins of the center and how it has grown.

“I believe that no other hazard center in the nation can match the critical mass of gifted scholars, insightful researchers, and committed teachers that roam the halls of the HRRC,” said Wanger, the center’s first director. He is now at the National Science Foundation, where he is directing its Infrastructure Systems Management and Hazard Response Program and its Information Technology and Infrastructures System Program.

The center’s home page on the Internet is at http://archone.tamu.edu/hrrc.
Real estate expert takes reins of land development program

Geoffrey John Booth is the incoming program coordinator of the Master of Science in Land Development program at Texas A&M’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning, a position previously held by Atef Sharkawy, who is retiring after 17 years on the College of Architecture faculty.

Prior to coming to Texas A&M, Booth served as senior fellow in sustainable development for Environmental Resources Management (ERM), an environmental consulting service. While at ERM, he advised for the Santee Cooper South Carolina Public Service Authority on the sustainable development of its extensive real estate portfolio and consulted the city of Alexandria, Va. on sustainable development and green building policy development and implementation. He also helped the city of Rockville, Md., formulate and implement a parks, recreation and open space plan and worked with the World Bank on Global City Indicators.

He came to the United States from Australia in 1999 to work for the Washington-based Urban Land Institute, where he became vice president of global development and spearheaded the organization’s expansion into Asia and Latin America and established a partnership with the World Bank.

In his 30-year career he has conceptualized, developed, financed, leased, managed and sold real estate projects and portfolios; run real estate joint venture companies and trusts; drafted, administered and defended public policy and legislative initiatives; provided leadership and direction to public, private and not-for-profit organizations; authored and edited a range of books, publications and opinion pieces; and has been a keynote speaker at conferences in Australia, Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

Born in Australia in 1957, he holds academic qualifications in urban planning, public administration, applied finance and investment.

LAUP professors make ‘most admired educators’ list

Two members of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning faculty at Texas A&M University were named among the “Most Admired Educators of 2009” in the latest edition of America’s Best Architecture & Design Schools, an annual publication compiled by the Design Futures Council, publishers of the bi-monthly DesignIntelligence newsletter.

Forster Ndubisi, professor and head of the department, and Michael Murphy, associate professor of landscape architecture, were among 26 U.S. educators listed by the publication as examples of excellence in design education leadership. The DesignIntelligence staff compiled the list from a survey of design professionals, academic department heads and students.

Ndubisi has headed the LAUP department since fall 2004. In addition to authoring numerous articles, papers and book chapters, he’s written three books, one of which received the Certificate of Merit Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects’ Washington chapter.

Ndubisi specializes in ecological design and planning, community design, growth management and interdisciplinary design education. Michael Murphy’s lasting influence on students was illustrated in 2005 when his former student, George W. Seagraves II ’80, established a $25,000 endowed scholarship in his name. Murphy taught several of Seagraves’ landscape architecture design courses.

“Professor Murphy challenged his students, though I probably didn’t appreciate it as much then as I do now,” said Seagraves, president of the Midwest region of D.R. Horton Inc., a nationwide residential homebuilding company.

Also in 2005, Waveland Press Inc. published Murphy’s landmark book, “Landscape Archi-

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Students tackle green challenge

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our buildings.” The contest encourages students to work with local individuals and institutions, identify the barriers and strengths to living sustainably, and develop a proposal to create a flourishing and sustainable community.

The Texas A&M student team includes master of urban planning students Anita Hollmann and Susan White, master of landscape architecture students Ben Langford and Ricardo Garcia, and civil engineering student Susan Paulus.

While the ACSA design challenge focused on the design of a “sustainable community,” the A&M team, Dumbaugh said, discovered that any attempt to address sustainability in a meaningful way required them to pay close attention to the community’s relationship with the systems on which it depends, such as water, energy, transportation, and agriculture — as well as the larger economic forces driving regional growth and development.

As these systems are best understood at the level of the metropolitan region, rather than an individual community, the design team developed a regional framework for sustainability.

“Because one of the major threats to regional sustainability is the developmental form embedded into local land use codes,” Dumbaugh said, “the team rewrote these codes, developing a form-based code for the region that clusters development around a proposed light rail line and which protects wetlands, wildlife corridors, and environmentally-sensitive lands.”

To prevent future development from encroaching into natural and agricultural lands, the team designated an urban services plan that delimits where future sewer, fire, police, and sanitation services will be provided — and where they will not. They also developed a plan for tapping into locally available clean energy sources, and developed design guidelines aimed at reducing the energy and water demands generated by future development.

“They have done an exceptional job of envisioning what a Sustainable Bryan-College Station might look like,” said Dumbaugh. “It is a smart solution to the design problem, and I think they have a better than even chance of placing in the national competition, if not winning the thing outright.”

Dept. head report

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cated in Transportation Planning is advancing as planned. President Murano approved the program in August 2008 as a university-wide certificate. Currently, 19 students are enrolled in the program and nine graduated in May 2009. The certificate program is a partnership between the department, Texas Transportation Institute, the Texas A&M Department of Civil Engineering, and the George Bush School of Government and Public Service.

Two of our graduate programs, the Master of Science in Land Development (MSLD) and the Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Science will be reviewed in the fall as a part of ongoing external reviews of all academic programs in the university. A national team of external reviewers will conduct a site visit during the first week of December. We are currently preparing self-study reports in advance of the visit. The department also submitted a major report to the Planning Accreditation Board in February 2009 on behalf of the Master of Urban Planning program and it received the most favorable review possible.

Two new faculty members joined the department in the 2008-09 academic year as tenure-track assistant professors, Dr. Yu Xiao and Dr. Zhifang Wang. We also appointed Michael Teal as an assistant professor of practice in our landscape architecture program. Additionally, Dr. Kent Anderson joined the faculty in September 2008 as an executive associate professor in the MSLD program and we recently hired Geoff Booth as the coordinator of the MSLD program and the Youngblood Endowed Professor of Land Development. He replaces Dr. Atef Sharkawy who retired in January 2009 after distinguished service as the coordinator of the program. Booth will join us in September 2009.

We continue to engage in numerous service learning initiatives coordinated through the department’s Partnerships for Community Outreach. We strive to engage our students with communities in need of assistance in creative ways. In some instances, these service/learning partnerships provide opportunities for our faculty and students to engage in community-based scholarship and result in the creation of new academic knowledge. This is particularly evident in the long-term relationships we have established with the Beaumont Housing Authority, the Timber Lane Utility District in Spring, Texas, and the Gulf Coast hurricane recovery efforts.

As we approach the next academic year, I express my gratitude for your collective support. I also remind former students and friends of the department that our continued and steady progress in strengthening the quality of our academic, research and engagement programs requires the collective support of students, faculty and staff, as well as our internal and external constituents, especially our professional program advisory boards.
Outstanding students recognized

Scholarships and other awards valued at more than $30,000 were presented to students at the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s Spring 2009 Awards Banquet held April 3 at the Pebble Creek Country Club.

1. Gene Schrickel Jr. ’50 Endowed Scholarship in Landscape Architecture
   • Matthew O’Toole (not pictured)
   • John Martineau

2. Texas Chapter of ASLA Endowed Scholarship
   • Kelli Ivy

3. Michael D. Murphy Endowed Scholarship
   • Whitney Proffitt

4. TBC Partners/Robert E. Castro Memorial Scholarship
   • Aaron Christian

5. Landscape Architecture Development Scholarship
   • Michael Droske (5a)
   • Yang Mi Kim (5b)
   • Megan Morris (5c)

6. Bachelor of Science in Urban & Regional Science Departmental Scholarship
   • Allison Land (6a)
   • Carlos Espinoza (6b)
   • Erin Williams (6c)
   • Kelli Schlicher (6d)
   • Aracely Rodriguez (6e)

7. Dr. Katherine F. Turnbull Scholarship
   • Sonja Willems

8. David Pugh Outstanding MVP Student Award
   • Kelli Hill

9. Jesus “Chuy” Hinojosa Academic Excellence Award
   • Daniel Galindo
   • Angie Lehnert
   • Nathanael Eric Proctor
   • Kelli Hill

10. Texas American Planning Association Scholarship
    • Stuart Sandidge
    • Erin Newcomer

11. Development Industry Advisory Council Scholarship
    • Chris McGhee (11a)
    • Kinjal Madiyar (11b)

12. Master of Science in Land Development Departmental Scholarship
    • Hong Kyu Choi
    • Aman Mehta
    • Robin Selvamani

13. Jesus Hinojosa Endowed Scholarship
    • Yue Ge

14. Urban & Regional Science Doctoral Departmental Scholarship
    • Joonghyuk Choi
    • Hyung Jin Kim
    • Paula Lorente

15. Jeffrey T. & Shelley E. Potter Endowed Scholarship
    • Kristina Benson
    • Catherine Chenevert (not pictured)
    • Steven Wesolowski (not pictured)
    • Micah Baker (not pictured)
Current, former students dominate Texas ASLA Awards

Current and former Texas A&M landscape architecture students made an impressive showing at the April 16 Texas Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects Awards Banquet in Austin, earning 11 awards for individual and group projects.

Award of Excellence
The 2009 Award of Excellence went to Dennis Jerke MLA ’78 for "Urban Design & the Bottom Line," a project he spearheaded for Jacobs. Jerke is an Outstanding Alumnus of the Texas A&M College of Architecture and a member of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning’s Professional Advisory Board.

Professional Merit Awards
Aggie landscape architecture graduates contributing to their firms’ Texas ASLA 2009 Merit Award winning projects included: David Hocker BLA ’01 for the Hocker Design Group’s Midbury House project and Travis Hawkins BLA ’08 for the SWA Group’s Arabian Canal project.

Professional Honor Awards
Former students who helping their firm capture a Texas ASLA 2009 Honor Award were David Hocker BLA ’01 for Hocker Design Group’s House on Cedar Hill project; Aan Colman BLA ’81 for Coleman & Associates Southpark Meadows project; Elizabeth McIlrath MLA ’01 for Jacob’s Dallas Trail Network Plan project; and Randy Phillips BLA ’79 of Jacobs for his design of the 2009 ASLA State Awards Book.

Student Honor Awards:
Texas ASLA 2009 Student Honor Awards were presented to Keaton Tucker, Steven Wesolowski, and Bernard Ng of the BLA Class of 2010 for their Post Oak Preserve project; John William Seyer, Angel Manuel Ruvakcaba, Jeremy Spade and Andrew Brown, members of the BLA Class of 2010, for their Destination Healthcare: Resort & Hospital project; Paul Cozzolino and Ryan Harbert of the BLA Class of 2009 for a Post-Occupancy Evaluation project; and Xun Sun MLA ’09 for a Fung-Shui-Based Urban Design & Site Design.
Professional Merit Award: David Hocker BLA ’01 contributed to the Hocker Design Group's Midbury House project.

Professional Merit Award: Travis Hawkins BLA ’08 worked on the SWA Group's Arabian Canal project.

Professional Honor Award: David Hocker BLA ’01 spearheaded Hocker Design Group's House on Cedar Hill project.

Professional Honor Award: Aan Colman BLA ’81 assisted with Coleman & Associates' Southpark Meadows project.

Professional Honor Award: Elizabeth McInrath MLA ’01 worked on Jacobs' Dallas Trail Network Plan.

Professional Honor Award: Randy Phillips BLA ’79 of Jacobs designed the 2008 Texas ASLA awards book.

The 2009 Award of Excellence went to Dennis Jerke MLA ’78 for "Urban Design and the Bottom Line," a project he spearheaded for Jacobs. Jerke is an Outstanding Alumnus of the Texas A&M College of Architecture and a member of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning's Professional Advisory Board.

BLA grad named managing principal of TBG Partners’ Dallas/Ft. Worth location

Mark Meyer, who received a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from Texas A&M’s College of Architecture in 1997, has been named a managing principal in the Dallas/Fort Worth office of TBG Partners.

Meyer has 12 years of experience, most of it with TBG, an Austin-based landscape architecture and planning firm. For the last decade, he’s been developing master plans and designs for city parks and recreational systems, mixed-use developments and urban revitalization districts.

In his new position, he will oversee design and planning for many of TBG’s metroplex projects, including a downtown 160-acre trades district called the Dallas Design District, the City of Coppell’s trail master plan, and Hometown, a 700-acre, neoclassical traditional neighborhood development.

He’s a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Congress for the New Urbanism, and is a member of the Urban Land Institute’s Community Development Council.
Verdoorn honored as College of Architecture Outstanding Alumnus

Texas A&M landscape architecture and urban planning graduate Joe T. Verdoorn BLA ’70, MUP ’71, a principal with SEC Planning, was honored this year as an Outstanding Alumnus of the Texas A&M College of Architecture.

The award is given annually to alumni who have distinguished themselves as pioneers in their professions and leaders in their respective communities.

During his 30-year career, Verdoorn has expanded the role of the landscape architect in the building/development industry and become a leader in the field of community design for residents older than 55.

With every project, he strives to educate clients to landscape architects’ multi-disciplinary expertise. To that end, he champions the landscape architect’s role as project manager, directing the efforts of consultant team members whose expertise are vital to a project’s success. Additionally, he has been a proponent of sustainable design techniques throughout his career, educating clients, consultant team members and associates to the benefits of working with the land.

He has also pursued his passion for active adult community design as lead planner for all 55+ communities built by Del Webb Corporation, an adult and family community developer.

During his involvement with Del Webb, he realized a new paradigm was needed to plan communities that appealed to this unique market. He began researching the demographics and psychographics of the active adult market to understand the expectations and motivations of these exacting consumers. From this, he created an active adult community model that has become an industry standard.

This research influenced the design, construction, and administration of numerous active adult communities and expanded the knowledge base of the profession. Due to his efforts and experience, he is recognized as an expert in the planning and design of active adult communities.

Verdoorn has trained countless young landscape architects, beginning with his years on the faculty of Texas Tech University. As proprietor of his own firm, Richardson Verdoorn, and now as a principal at SEC Planning, he takes a personal interest in mentoring staff. His hands-on approach allows these individuals to grow in their knowledge and experience of landscape architecture.

His achievements include:
- his selection as lead planner for all new communities by Del Webb Corporation after a national search effort in 1979;
- a distinguished career at firms including Carter & Burgess, Myrick-Newman-Dahlberg & Partners, a 20-year career as a founding partner of Richardson Verdoorn and a founding principal at SEC Planning, LLC;
- teaching or mentoring more than 12 professional landscape architects who have gone on to establish their own planning/design firms.