Chapter 3:  
Campus Heritage Plan Study Area

Summary

Built on the summit of Mount Oread, a prominent hill overlooking the Wakarusa and Kaw River valleys in eastern Kansas, the nearly 1,000-acre campus of the University of Kansas lies at the heart of the rapidly expanding community of Lawrence, Kansas. Now a growing service and research center of more than 80,000 people, Lawrence is also home to thousands of workers who commute to both Topeka and Kansas City.

It is impossible to understand KU’s historic campus core without understanding the broader ecological, transportation and population structures of the surrounding region. From its founding, the Lawrence campus has been sited along major transportation routes by the waters of the Kansas and Wakarusa rivers and by land with travelers on the pioneer trails.

The campus is located along a web of trails that comprised the Oregon Trail. Weaving up the south slope of today’s main campus and roughly along Jayhawk Boulevard, the trails ultimately connected the entire nation, creating an avenue of cultural diffusion extending from Westport, Missouri, to the Pacific Ocean. Understanding regional topography can help us to understand why the trail was located here and how the community of Lawrence and ultimately KU grew up where they did. These regional and geographic origins will be discussed in the next chapter.

This chapter visually defines the study area and its relation to the whole of Mount Oread, the KU campus today and the City of Lawrence. The historic contexts provided within this study build upon the analyses and recommendations of the Campus Landscape Master Plan from 2002. The maps to follow are annotated both to highlight key features and to explain how they served as form-givers for campus and community growth.
AERIAL PERSPECTIVE MAP: The aerial map shown above was captured by using Google Earth.
LOCATION MAP: The City of Lawrence is situated in northeast Kansas between the Kansas and Wakarusa rivers, approximately midway between the cities of Kansas City and Topeka. The University of Kansas overlooks the historic center of Lawrence.
The Lawrence campus contains approximately 1,000 acres between the main and west campuses, which adjoin one another along Iowa Street (Highway 59).
The Ridge

When settlers arrived in eastern Kansas, it was largely prairie-grass country with wooded areas found along the rivers. Early writings mention a treeless Mount Oread, on the ridge, with knee-high prairie grasses, clumps of sumac and red cedar, and views of the Kaw River valley and the early town of Lawrence.

The story of KU’s landscape design history begins in the late 1850’s when Lawrence Free-staters, with funds from the same Easterners who financed their moves to Kansas, chartered a “University of Kansas Territory” in Douglas County. They had a choice of sites back then, but picked Mount Oread for the location of the University because of its magnificent views off of the ridge.

The University and City of Lawrence have a long history of mutual cooperation. Lawrence citizens greatly appreciate the University’s cultural and aesthetic contributions and vice-versa. Both the University and City derive mutual benefit from their close relationship. With few exceptions, this has resulted in successful city/campus planning ventures.
The University of Kansas Campus Heritage Plan - Chapter 3

The relationship between the University and the community is unique in that the University is bordered by a number of different types of neighborhoods, each with its own character. A critical factor in the consideration of adjoining neighborhoods is that they house a major complement of University faculty, staff and students. The basic issue is to foster an attractive, secure campus edge and ensure that the University does not have a deleterious effect on the neighborhoods. There is a campus-wide need to strengthen and improve the physical linkages between the University and the surrounding communities. Linkages will be affected by several factors including the brow of the ridge. Preserving adjoining neighborhoods would be in the best interest of the University because of its buffering effect and its character-defining contribution to sense of place as the “University on the Hill” through definition of the ridge of Mount Oread.
The University on the Hill

The Campus Landscape Master Plan uses the term “landscape” in its broadest sense to cover all aspects of the landscape, including open space, plant materials, the contour of the land, nature of walls, steps, pavements, buildings and furnishings. All of these contribute to the image of the campus.

The characterizing features of the campus include its buildings, views, vistas and landscaping. These features reflect the tradition of higher education in general and also are a testament to the vision and investment of previous generations of students, graduates and Kansas residents. The rich and vivid experiences of students and alumni are tied to the physical attributes of Mount Oread. The KU experience is one of tradition that is in great part based on its physical surroundings. As a result, the KU campus is rare among educational institutions, and we should embrace the honor and recognize the duty to preserve that sense of tradition and place. For those of us who intimately know the campus and its history, we would agree with Chancellor Robert Hemenway’s description in his 1998 convocation address to faculty and staff, that the main campus of the University is indeed a “special piece of greenery called Mount Oread, which many of us believe is one of the most beautiful campuses in the U.S.”

Objective and Purpose of Plan

The Landscape Master Plan provides a general direction for preserving and enhancing the campus landscape. The main campus of the University has a long and rich history. Since 1904, planners have tried to imagine what the campus should look like and how KU’s physical future can best be shaped. The 1973 Long Range Development Plan set in place many of the planning assumptions held today, including Jayhawk Boulevard as the academic center of the campus and the preservation and development of green spaces as a high priority.

This Landscape Master Plan implemented the concepts and recommendations of the 1997 Campus Plan, the accepted framework for campus renewal and future physical development. The Campus Plan set the basic groundwork for future development issues of land use, access, image and environment for the next 20 years. The two guiding principles to the campus planning effort are:

- Preserve the beauty of Mount Oread
- Create an environment that shows respect for learning
There has never been a systematic plan to incorporate landscape into the mission of the University. Over the past years, storms, disease and mechanical damage have taken their toll on thousands of campus trees; many others are age-worn. There is also pressure from too many groups impacting the campus landscape with building projects while there are no guidelines available to ensure protection of the image of the campus. Now it is time to address these impacts on the landscape.

The Subcommittee on Student Needs recommended that guidelines for the quality and quantity of open and green space should be established, that spaces already in existence be retained and that recreation areas be developed. The University should also address the need for more and varied formal and informal spaces and facilities to accommodate the recreational interests of a diverse and growing student population, according to the subcommittee.

A Subcommittee on Environmental Issues focused on the idea that physical development planning should steer the campus away from potentially negative environmental or health and safety impacts. A major recommendation of the committee was that the University make environmental impact an important consideration in campus planning and decision-making. It advises that proactive measures to reduce negative impacts are the most cost-effective means of lessening environmental degradation and recommends that the University develop and maintain unpaved open green space and seek to minimize the effect of the built environment on these spaces. The committee recognizes that green space improves campus views and vistas and preserves and enhances the campus climate.

The KU/Lawrence Relationships group of the planning task force focused on community access to the campus, use of the campus and maintaining open communication between city government and KU. Among the recommendations of the group was that open areas for recreation and leisure that create a park-like environment should be maintained and enhanced for the benefit of the entire community.

As stated by Chancellor Hemenway in the Foreword of the Campus Plan document, “...our physical planning will communicate to all, through the media of architecture, landscape and space, the respect for learning and growth of knowledge which characterizes a great university.” The following are specific objectives of the Campus Landscape Master Plan:

- Coordinate elements and concepts of the Campus Plan, including parking, vehicular movement, pedestrian access and bicycle routes.
- Illustrate specific landscape recommendations incorporating organizational principles of land use, access, image and environment.
• Establish concepts and recommendations for improving the exterior environment of the campus that reflect an appropriate scale and variety of materials to support the campus image and environmental quality.

• Provide design guidance that will be used for campus development to improve the functional characteristics and visual appearance of the component elements that comprise the exterior environment of the campus.

• Identify and design, to the schematic level, certain elements of the campus landscape plan.

• Evaluate maintenance practices and make recommendations that support maintenance procedures and demonstrate reciprocal value.

• Establish a wayfinding system supported by an updated campus graphics system.

Specific elements of the Master Plan designed to schematic level include:

• Campus Entries
• Jayhawk Boulevard
• Mid-Hill Walk
• Memorial Drive
• Maintenance procedures for existing and projected landscape development
• Cost analysis for various types of maintenance
• Exterior graphics program

The Master Plan strived to devise a “fitting plan” for improving the image of the campus. The plan set the framework for achieving a campus landscape character that is harmonious with its surrounding architecture and reflected the historical and philosophical traditions of the University associated with its past growth and development. The plan also accommodated the requirements of the University population while accommodating the needs of a functioning institution. As we move forward, it should result in an appropriate landscape, one in which the exterior spaces complement campus architecture and the campus environment.
The purpose of the study was also to formulate a vision and strategy for improving the campus image and to arouse an appreciation of its existing conditions and potential. That strategy serves as a guide for enhancing, extending and managing the campus landscape as a unifying element to the campus physical framework while respecting its traditions. That strategy will also contribute to meeting the functional requirements of the University, and create a framework that will guide the future development of outdoor spaces.

Conscious planning, conservation, sustainability, diversity and education should be the primary means to provide the University with a well-developed campus landscape. In return, the campus landscape will serve as a new and vital resource for the continuing advancement of the mission of the University.

Over the past several years, the University administration has begun to focus renewed attention on the importance of a quality physical environment. It is important to develop a comprehensive approach to preserving, enhancing, managing and extending the campus landscape.

University Context

Relevance to the University’s Mission Statement

The Campus Landscape Master Plan is an outgrowth of the Chancellor’s Initiative 2001 Strategic Planning Process. The University’s Mission Statement is committed to values of excellence and cultural enrichment. In his message on Initiative 2001 and his 1995 convocation speech, Chancellor Hemenway has stated, “We know we will continue to improve our teaching, enhance our learning, increase our research and manage our resources because the quest for excellence never stops. Our challenge today is to take our great university and make it better.”

Of the Chancellor’s 10 points for a great university, the one most pertinent to campus facility planners stated that a great university maintains, preserves and enhances its facilities and physical setting.

The Campus Master Plan is an adjunct to the 1997 Campus Plan. The 1997 Campus Plan was initiated upon the Chancellor’s request that the Task Force on Initiative 2001 consider six characteristics of the University: information technology, faculty knowledge and talents, student attitudes and aptitudes, the research environment, international opportunities and the physical environment. In his 1998 convocation speech, Provost David Shulenburger stressed that we
must enhance the nature of the KU experience by building on our historic strengths. There is a remarkably strong sense of place or strength of identity with KU and Mount Oread that is shared by faculty, staff, students, alumni and citizens of Kansas. Maintaining this sense of place was one of eight challenges the Task Force identified.