Wayne Nemec
Third Year Student
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

Landscape Performance

Throughout my curriculum most of what I have learned is how the designs I create affect people, and how the methods I have used help support my overall design concept. Often it feels that curriculum is more heavily based on design and graphical representation and not as heavily influenced by the multiple benefits that can be achieved by a landscape beyond just its physical appearance. There needs to be a better way to learn about sustainability as a tool to better improve our designs so that students do not see it as a roadblock that limits creativity. Teaching about sustainability can be difficult and it can take a lot of research to stay on top of it, but it is important for the future landscape architect to be aware of and excel in it.

In the winter quarter of 2015 my studio, with Ellen Burke as our instructor, focused on landscape performance. Even though the term "landscape performance" was somewhat new to me, I did have an understanding of what it means for a landscape to be sustainable. I knew about things like bioswales, retention ponds, and rain gardens, but there was not a strong focus to implement them into our designs. The biggest question for me was how much these features actually benefit the environment, and if they could be implemented in a way that does not inhibit the overall design intention. What I really needed were some visual examples of projects that are both good at landscape performance and physically attractive places to be in. I did not just want to implement rain barrels all over my project and call it good, I wanted to create a space that was both captivating and beneficial to the surrounding area.

As a class we were given a glimpse of the Landscape Performance Series from the Landscape Architecture Foundation, and I was surprised to see how much information is presented on the website, with various landscape examples of different calibers. There are examples from constructed wetlands to highly designed urban spaces, and the website fully breaks down all these by explaining how the sites achieve sustainability. Some of the best information the website has to offer is not just about how these projects help the environment, but how some of these spaces have also helped spark economic revenue by rejuvenating depressed urban areas. By looking at these great projects that are both aesthetically pleasing and great examples of landscape performance it gave me a better understanding of how I could make my own designs serve a greater overall purpose.

With the help of the Landscape Performance Series, the students in my studio were given the task of turning our project into a performance landscape. Our project site was to redesign the front yard for the president of the university. The class was broken up into teams of three with each one of the team members being in charge of studying a certain aspect of a performance landscape and incorporating it into our group design. The benefit I chose to incorporate into my team's landscape was to control stormwater runoff and better the overall quality for the potential water that could leave the site and go into the nearby creek. I researched how to improve the

water quality by looking up projects from the landscape performance series and reading the case studies about how the different landscape architects were able to achieve their goals. After gathering our information, my team decided to reduce the slope on our site by implementing a series of retaining walls while having a swale and planted retention garden at the bottom of the slope to hold as much water as possible and to filter out the fertilizers and pesticides as the water seeps through the soil. With the calculations I found though my professor and the Landscape Performance Series, my team's project reduced the amount of surface runoff by 50% and we were able to capture all site runoff from a five-year storm event in our retention pond, which basically eliminated all the runoff since we live in the dry climatic area of California's central coast.

Learning about performance landscapes is beneficial to our education and I think it should be taught more due to the state our planet is in at the moment. If I had to critique any aspect of our performance studio it would be that I wish we could have done more with it. There were still ways that we could have learned more about being sustainable, but due to time restrictions, by being on a quarterly schedule, I can see how it would have been hard to cram more within our class time. Honestly there needs to be more non-studio classes addressing landscape performance. Also now that I know about the Landscape Performance Series website I have been able to use it on current projects in other studios, and whenever I recommend it to other students they are pretty surprised by how much information can be found there. Again there needs to be a better way to teach sustainability in schools so that it does not sound restrictive to student's design capability. Having students read case studies about performance landscapes on the Landscape Performance Series website I think is a great way to promote sustainability. Some of my favorite parks that I did not realize to be sustainable actually turned out to be great performance landscapes, and I would have not known that if I were never shown the Landscape Performance Series.