

# From Grey to Green

**Texas State University undergoes a transformation to become a Lone Star leader in sustainability.**

By Trent Rush

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**A**t a hilly university campus situated on more than 450 acres in central Texas, an ongoing transformation from grey to green is establishing one of the Lone Star State's largest colleges as a leader in sustainable development.

University enrollment has increased approximately 45 percent during the last 10 years. With a fall 2012 enrollment of about 35,000 students, Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, has demonstrated growth with a purpose.

Much of the university's success stems from the development of a 10-year campus master

plan — a process that began in 2003 and was updated in 2011 — and it has played an integral role in taking what was for years largely seen as a commuter school and turning it into a student-centered campus environment. The planning process involved input from students, faculty and staff who made it clear that the campus should include more nature and less concrete, establishing the grey-to-green motif as a key focus.

Adopted in May 2005, the campus master plan was rooted in an effort to "Honor the Past, Claim the Future," and supports new and ongoing aca-

demic programming initiatives with long-term objectives for growth, identity and functionality.

One of the master plan's five guiding principles is an emphasis on the natural environment. With rolling hills, mature cypress and pecans defining the campus and the beautiful San Marcos River meandering along the edge, the scenic character is resplendent.

To enhance this physical campus environment, the master plan called for the systematic removal of surface parking lots and the closure of internal streets to create a comprehensive network of open green spaces. The benefits of this approach are multifaceted. From an ecological perspective, the grey-to-green transformation provides stormwater detention that, along with the harvesting of rainwater and air-conditioning condensate, significantly alleviates irrigation needs; moreover, the conversion adds significant amounts of permeable surface, reducing the local heat island effect and creating a cooler microclimate.

Functionally, the campus transformation emphasizes an extension of the central quad's intimate, welcoming character through a series of pedestrian corridors while simultaneously improving campus walkability, vehicular management and pedestrian circulation. From a social standpoint, the addition of multipurpose green spaces provides space for both passive and active recreation, fostering community and creating a sense of place.

Aesthetically, the addition of considerable green space provides a warmer, more inviting look and feel, which is complemented by the consistent use of native plants, paving materials and site furnishings, achieving a harmonious character throughout the campus' physical environs.

Master plan implementation began in 2006, and in September 2010, a review and update was initiated that re-examined the guidelines and implementation plan to ensure long-term

viability. The implementation process has included dozens of individual projects, including the modification of existing pedestrian walks and the removal of vehicular streets as part of the transformation from a vehicular-dominated campus to a pedestrian-oriented environment. The following projects represent some of the most significant projects as part of Texas State's overall campus adaptation.

### **Bobcat Trail**

One of the most significant initial projects will be the conversion of a heavily trafficked vehicular throughway into Bobcat Trail, a pedestrian promenade including plazas and lawns for larger events as well as smaller seating areas and pavilions for more intimate groups. The project creates a shaded walkway parallel to the original academic quad, and its lawns will also provide a valuable stormwater detention function.

### **Concho Green**

A similar project that highlights the university's green commitment was the conversion of Concho Street, which separated Lantana and Butler halls from Sterry and Falls halls, with a landscape mall known as the Concho Green. Located between three existing dormitories, this expanse from Moon Street to LBJ Drive is the campus' largest non-programmed open space and is a favorite place for student enjoyment. The space is used for a variety of passive recreational activities and serves as a ceremonial front yard for the university.

### **UAC**

A new Undergraduate Academic Center (UAC), seeking LEED Silver, is nearing completion. Its landscape design connects to Bobcat Trail on the east and extends to Albert B. Alkek Library. The design includes a 36,000-gallon subsurface cistern to collect stormwater and roof runoff as well as air-conditioning condensate; all

irrigation in this area is derived from the cistern and requires no potable water. In addition, a rain garden in the cistern overflow area further aids with stormwater management. The space serves as a promenade harmoniously uniting the UAC's Spanish Colonial vernacular with the more contemporary aesthetic of adjacent buildings. It offers café areas articulated by distinctive site furnishings and a palette of native and adaptive plants.

### **North Campus Housing Complex**

A new 612-bed traditional student residential facility, the North Campus Housing Complex, was recently completed near the LBJ Student Center at the corner of Comanche Street and Sessom Drive. The project is seeking LEED Silver certification and includes a large interior courtyard, which previously had been a parking lot, that is one of the larger open green spaces on campus. A 50,000-gallon subsurface cistern collects stormwater and roof runoff, as well as air-conditioning condensate, meeting all irrigation needs without the use of potable water; the system is partially exposed, serving a didactic purpose. The landscape design includes a sunken amphitheatre and adjacent common lawn, while streetscapes along the building's exterior buffer the adjacent vehicular traffic at one of the campus' busiest intersections.

### **PAC**

Construction is also underway at the corner of University Drive and Moon Street on a premier performance venue. The Performing Arts Center (PAC), which will seek LEED Silver certification, plans to include a 400-seat theater and a 300-seat recital hall plus a grand lobby, rehearsal space, a scenery shop, staging areas and classrooms. The landscape design includes a south courtyard plaza and exterior streetscape, which will create a new campus edge along the university's southern boundary.

These and other projects, in addition to a number of campus initiatives related to issues like recycling, occupancy sensors, lighting and utilities, have not only created a unique and welcoming sense of place at the rapidly growing San Marcos campus, but the overall efforts have raised awareness about the importance of sustainable approaches and established Texas State as a leader in environmental stewardship.

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