

Course Focus

HORT 131 – Landscape Design History & Theory

by Jennifer Britton



*"It is only in appearance that time is a river. It is rather a vast landscape and it is the eye of the beholder that moves."
~Thornton Wilder*

We can look at history as a linear progression or we can examine our cultural past as if it behaves like a web, with threads weaving, touching, intersecting and turning, only to momentarily confluence. For me teaching landscape design history as a sequence of dates and figures to memorize was a sure remedy for insomnia and it's probably not a good idea to nap in front of a class of students! Therefore, to introduce students to our ever changing relationship with landscape and place, HORT 131 Landscape Design History & Design builds upon historical thematic



Earth Art Class Project outside Linfield Hall, Fall 2013. Photo by Jennifer Britton.

"threads," demonstrating the influence past ideologies have on our physical environment today. For example, during one "thread", we explore how sacred and philosophical views during the Enlightenment period led to the Rural Cemetery Movement, which in-turn influenced the father of Landscape Architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted (you might know him as the designer of New York's Central Park). Both played pivotal roles in the establishment of parks and more importantly National Parks, and in turn this progression underpins the Wilderness Movement and the regulations for environmental protection. There are sixteen chapters in the required book *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* and we work our way through the book not in chronological order but in these thematic threads. Pertinent articles, in print and on the web, augment the readings. My hope in this approach is to connect students to landscape in a meaningful, relevant way.

The intellectual intent of the course is broad in scope and reasonably deep in investigating the evolving practice of landscape architecture/design profession. In order to develop a broad view and perspective the course is about sharing, developing and obtaining knowledge at a variety of scales and in various contexts. To accomplish a multi-sensory teaching approach students experience a variety of media and most lectures incorporate music, taste, touch and scent. We also have a series of field trips to explore locations and concept in situ including Bozeman's very own "rural cemetery" Sunset Hills Cemetery, where students try their hand at cemetery stone rubbings and exploring the meaning of iconographic symbols on headstones. Beyond traditional quizzes (yes, there are a few dates/names students need to memorize!), students also engage in two narrative short assignments in which they demonstrate important traditions, movements and key designers through creating a 1) Landscape Mask and 2) Postcards from a National Park. Students also participate in a Research Case Study, an analysis of design precedent through a PowerPoint Presentation & Case Study paper. And just to keep people on their toes, I have an historical lie in every class that, if caught, results in me throwing out a cool refreshing Peppermint Pattie prize!

The class meets every Fall Semester for lecture class twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday from 10:50-12:05, and the class size averages 20-30 students, small enough that I am able to know every student in my class. Although it is a required course for the Environmental Horticulture Landscape Design students, enrollment includes many students from other majors and with diverse perspectives comes lively discussion!