

Course Focus

Hort 491: Environmental Planning and Design: issues and concepts - Rebekah VanWieren



How can private and public stakeholders collaborate to preserve prime agricultural land? What kinds of local ordinances should landscape designers be mindful of in creating a planting plan? What tools can communities use to develop long-term trail and park plans? How can land developers apply site design strategies to minimize negative ecological impacts?

Hort 491 is a new elective that is a survey of environmental land planning and design issues for students who have some background in a related discipline (land management, horticulture, design, environmental studies). The course is designed to introduce students to historical and contemporary issues of environmental and urban planning in the United States, exploring the evolving nature of land development and community design, and their relationship with environmental sustainability. In this quest, students are challenged to consider the roles of various public and private stakeholders in the community design process, and to unearth their occasionally competing values. Students also gain exposure to practical environmental planning and community design practices they will likely encounter in their professional careers.

We recently finished discussing the book *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, which explores how post-WWII land development brought awareness to many of the environmental land use issues we encounter today. Later in the term, students will draw from their environmental planning and design “toolbox” to develop design recommendations on local projects including campus sustainability planning and community environmental plans.

My hope is that students gain an appreciation for the vital role of the environmental planning process in a designer’s work of creating sustainable places, and that they are encouraged by the impact landscape designers can have on land-use environmental issues in their communities.

Environmental planning relies on interdisciplinary problem solving, and next year, my goal for the class is to draw students from other disciplines to supplement the interdisciplinary conversation in the classroom (so please tell your advisees).