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Outdoor Gathering Spaces on the University of Iowa Campus

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Field Problems in Planning II
Graduate Program in Urban and Regional Planning
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May 13, 2004

Prepared for Larry Wilson
University of Iowa Campus Planning

Property of Urban and Regional Planning
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. Purpose and Scope

Our two key questions for this project were:

- How can we develop a campus and landscape that is more meaningful to users?
- How can we get users more engaged in the architectural and landscape resources the campus offers?

These two questions are centered around creating a “sense of place” on campus. Campus users who have a sense of place are aware of their environment and feel connected to its features. A key part of this “sense of place” is the University’s outdoor gathering spaces.

II. Methodology

We studied where people are gathering on campus and for what purpose. We also considered strengths and weaknesses of these spaces based upon four components:

- Seating infrastructure;
- Access, location, and noise;
- Green elements; and
- Sunshine and shade.

Observations were made from September through November of 2003. We collected information on location, type of observed activity, and the number of people involved. Activity types were classified according to four categories:

- Active or recreational uses,
- Informal gatherings,
- Non-social activities, and
- Outdoor classrooms.

III. Findings

Some outdoor gathering spaces are more popular than others, and use types are consistent within most spaces. All four identified components are not necessary to create a successful gathering space; necessary components are dependent upon activity type.

Observed gathering spaces were grouped into three categories:
- Successful gathering spaces,
- Underused gathering spaces, and
- Potential gathering spaces.

Recommendations for each of these gathering spaces were based upon personal experience and the four identified components for successful gathering spaces.

IV. Recommendations

For successful gathering spaces on campus, we recommend few changes. These spaces are popular because their characteristics are tailored to their intended use.

Three common problems were identified for the underused gathering spaces on campus—a lack of green elements, limited access, and ill-maintained seating infrastructure. Recommendations to address these problems are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Recommendations for Underused Gathering Spaces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Problem</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete spaces lacking green elements</td>
<td>Place planters containing flowers throughout the space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Install landscaped ledges within the space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create tree islands to break up wide expanses of concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited access by gates, fences, or walls</td>
<td>Widen gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Add more access points along tall fences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shorten fences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remove fences completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill-maintained or uncomfortable seating infrastructure</td>
<td>Restore seating with historically valuable characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replace old benches with newer, more comfortable designs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The identified potential gathering spaces on campus have unique characteristics that warrant consideration. The majority of these potential spaces lack seating infrastructure and are secluded from primary pedestrian pathways. We suggest that these spaces be considered for a structured outdoor classroom. This would provide the opportunity for classes to be held outdoors in a quiet and comfortable setting. These structured spaces could double as informal gathering spaces during non-classroom periods.
HOW DO GATHERING SPACES DEFINE A SENSE OF PLACE?

Introduction

The University of Iowa first opened to students in 1855. It was fifty years later that the first signs of organized campus planning appeared. The first University Plan of 1905 was short and simple, containing no maps and addressing few campus features. The first contemporary campus plan, containing maps and a comprehensive view of the University, was adopted in 1965 (University of Iowa, 1998).

Today campus planning is described as a “flexible, on-going process that anticipates and plans for future needs” (University of Iowa, 1998). Campus planning is guided by the Sesquicentennial Campus Planning Framework, prepared in 1998 by Dunbar/Jones Partnership. The Framework serves not as a fixed plan for the campus, but as a guide for physical development (University of Iowa, 1998).

One of the overriding goals within the University of Iowa Campus Planning Framework is to develop a stronger “sense of place” on campus. Campus users who have a strong sense of place feel connected to the campus environment, meaning that they are familiar with and respect its features. They are aware of the University’s historical, artistic and natural resources and therefore have meaningful and memorable interactions with the campus.

Outdoor gathering spaces help to define this “sense of place” for campus users. This project examines how outdoor gathering spaces are currently used, and identifies successful, underused, and potential gathering spaces on campus. Recommendations are made for enhancing these underused and potential gathering spaces.

Who uses the University of Iowa campus?

When one thinks about “The University of Iowa” as a place, one is inclined to think of an academic setting filled with students and professors. However, there are hundreds of other campus users. According to the University of Iowa Registrar, there were 29,745 students registered at the start of the 2003-04 academic year. At this same time, there were 13,642 registered faculty and staff members working on campus, including those at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. For these users, the
campus is a place to learn, work, live, and participate in the events and resources the University offers (University of Iowa, 2003).

The University of Iowa exists as a separate, but not isolated sub-community within Iowa City. Therefore, there are many campus users other than University students, staff, and faculty. For non-University users, whether from the Iowa City community or beyond, campus is a place to see a theatrical production, eat lunch, attend a sporting event, take a walk along the Iowa River, visit a museum, or attend a campus orientation session.

Every user has a different way of creating a sense of place within the campus environment. The way in which outdoor gathering spaces are used to create a sense of place depends on the user’s role within the University or the larger community. For a University of Iowa student, a gathering space might be a place to study or participate in an outdoor classroom. For an Iowa City resident working downtown, that same space might be a place to eat lunch or socialize with a coworker.

**What is a “sense of place”?**

Kevin Lynch explores the concept of sense of place in his book *The Image of the City*. Lynch talks about the ‘legibility’ of the city, meaning “the ease with which its parts can be recognized into a coherent pattern” (Lynch, 1960). When a city dweller (or campus user in the case of this study) is able to recognize and assign meaning to the places around them, they feel as if they know where they are and are connected to their environment. In other words, they have a “sense of place”.

A sense of place is important for people to enjoy their surroundings and feel safe within them. According to the Campus Planning Framework, “A campus environment that is convenient, safe, and provides appropriate and desirable surroundings to stimulate the mind, body, and spirit in the pursuit of academic excellence is important in attracting talented students, faculty, and staff” (University of Iowa, 1998).

The student population spends the majority of its time on campus. For students, the educational experience at the University is much broader than just attending classes. The campus environment affects nearly every aspect of a student’s life including their academic, social, and personal experiences. If these additional experiences were not
significant, a traditional campus-based education at the University of Iowa would be no different from remote learning or obtaining an online education.

Richard C. Stedman also explores the sense of place concept in a journal article entitled *Is It Really Just a Social Construction? The Contribution of The Physical Environment to Sense of Place*. Stedman describes 'place attachment' as a core concept in developing a sense of place. Place attachment is "a positive emotional bond that develops between people and their environment" (Stedman, 2003). He states, "Spaces become 'places' as they become imbued with meaning through lived experiences" (Stedman, 2003). To develop "place attachment" at the University of Iowa, campus users must build a collection of positive experiences and memories within its spaces.

Historical sites, artistic works, architectural features, trails, and natural spaces are all important components in defining the campus as a place. Some campus features, such as the Iowa River or the Old Capitol are widely recognizable (Figure 1). Because campus users, especially students, spend a lot of time outdoors traveling from place to place, studying, relaxing, or meeting with friends, they can recognize and relate to many of the outdoor locations on campus.

**Figure 1.** The Old Capitol symbolizes the University of Iowa and is a widely recognized campus feature. (Photo: Erin Welsch)

**Gathering Spaces at the University of Iowa**

At nearly 2,000 acres in size, the University of Iowa campus is one of the largest in the Midwest. It is also one of the least fragmented, meaning the campus has defined boundaries rather than existing in small patches all over the city. Parts of the campus are compact, but abundant green spaces ensure that it does not appear too dense. These open spaces allow campus users many opportunities to take a break and study, relax, or socialize no matter where they are on campus. Most of these spaces are found along
major paths and therefore are not hard to find. They range from large green spaces like the Pentacrest Lawns, Hancher Green, or Hubbard Park, to smaller constructed spaces such as the T. Anne Cleary Walkway, the John Pappajohn Business Building Courtyard, or the Hillcrest Courtyard.

The physical design of the campus is highly pedestrian-oriented. As a result, most campus destinations are located within a comfortable walking distance from one another. Many campus users therefore choose walking as their primary mode of transportation, and encounter many outdoor gathering spaces along their paths of travel.

For the purpose of this study, we defined ‘gathering space’ as any place where an individual or group engages in any type of activity. Outdoor gathering spaces can be formal, physically planned spaces or informal spaces that develop over time through social interaction. According to the Campus Master Plan of Texas State Technical College’s Waco Campus, “While successful outdoor gathering spaces are usually planned, sometimes spaces simply evolve as a result of human social interaction. Gathering and seating areas become places of significance through patterns of activity and routine of use” (Texas State Technical College, 2004).

Spaces like the Hillcrest Courtyard were designed to facilitate group or solo study, and social activities. The circular arrangement of benches within a landscaped setting encourages interaction (Figure 2). Other places have become recognized gathering spaces through the uses and activities occurring in them over time. For example, the Pentacrest Lawns contain no benches or tables. The lawns were not designed to facilitate student gatherings, but rather to focus attention on the Old Capitol. The east lawns are contained with short, decorative fences along Clinton Street and along the pedestrian pathways running through the Pentacrest, inhibiting lawn access in some

Figure 2. The Hillcrest Courtyard was designed to facilitate gatherings. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)
areas. Yet students routinely step over the fences and gather on the lawns to study, sunbathe, or attend outdoor class discussions (Figure 3). This is one of the most popular gathering spaces on campus not because it was designed to facilitate group meetings, but because it has been socially constructed as a gathering space. The Pentacrest’s central campus location makes it an activity node for many user types. Through years of interactions, campus users have built up experiences and memories within this space, making it a gathering space full of personal meanings.

Components of Successful Gathering Spaces

*The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* by William H. Whyte looks at city spaces and discusses why some work as gathering spaces while others fail. Whyte also points out fundamental lessons that can be learned from these spaces. Considering Whyte’s recommendations and our own personal experiences at the University of Iowa, we identified the following four components to use in critiquing the University’s outdoor gathering spaces:

- Seating Infrastructure;
- Access/Location/Noise;
- Green Elements;
- Sunshine/Shade.

A gathering space does not need to maximize all of these components to be successful. Necessary components are dependent upon a space’s use patterns. For example, a gathering space used primarily for active uses does not need structured seating areas with benches, tables, or chairs. These elements would get in the way of recreational activities, as would abundant trees or other landscaped features. The best gathering spaces tailor a combination of these components to the space’s use characteristics.
Seating Infrastructure

Whyte has a simple theory regarding seating infrastructure. He states, “People tend to sit most where there are places to sit” (Whyte, 1980). Many students especially will sit anywhere on campus—on benches, ledges, railings, stairs, or in the grass (Figure 4).

Structured seating must be physically comfortable. This does not mean that all seats need back supports and arm rests, although a few seats with these amenities should be provided for elderly users and those with mobility restrictions. The ideal height for a seat is 17 inches according to Whyte, but he states that most people will sit on a ledge anywhere from one to three feet off the ground. For a double-facing ledge that provides seating on both sides, 30 inches is an acceptable width, but a 36-inch width will provide even more personal space between people. (Whyte, 1980)

Seating should also be socially comfortable. To Whyte, this means having a choice of where to sit (Figure 5). The best spaces allow campus users to choose whether to sit in the sun or the shade, or in a group or alone. A cluster of seats grouped together work well for social gatherings or classrooms, but an individual seeking privacy might hesitate to sit in close proximity to other individuals. (Whyte, 1980)
For spaces lacking structured seating, Whyte states, “Even though benches and chairs can be added, the best course is to maximize the sittability of inherent features” (Whyte, 1980). Money can be saved from new infrastructure by being creative with features already in place. For example, spaces that have ledges or other flat features can be cleared or widened to provide seating areas. Just a few extra inches on a two-sided ledge can double its seating area.

Whyte concludes that a “forced choice is rarely chosen”, and suggests movable chairs as the best form of seating in any space (Whyte, 1980). Movable chairs expand the choices a user can make by allowing them to sit where and with whom they want. However, movable seats such as these cannot be left out twenty-four hours a day without the risk of theft.

Access, Location, and Noise

Due to the pedestrian-orientation of campus, many gathering spaces are highly visible and easily accessible from major pathways, and are therefore used on a regular basis. The best spaces are not gated or fenced off from pedestrians in any way. When spaces have wide open entry points, campus users are more likely to view them as public spaces meant to be used by everyone. Spaces should be accessible to all user types, including those with mobility restrictions. “Planning that provides accessibility of all students and fosters independence of mobility will both support existing students, faculty, and staff, and attract a broader base of campus participants” (The University of Iowa, 1998). Gathering spaces should therefore contain few stairs, or provide ramps or sloped pavement as access alternatives.

Gathering spaces along high-traffic pedestrian routes are likely to have the most dense use patterns. The highest pedestrian numbers are observed

![Figure 6. An outdoor classroom gathering along the Iowa River, in a space sheltered from traffic noise. (Photo: University Relations Photography)](Image)
weekdays on the central east campus, especially near the Pentacrest, Main Library, Iowa Memorial Union, and T. Anne Cleary Walkway.

The amount of noise present within a gathering space can also influence its use patterns. For recreational uses and some social gatherings, external noises might not be an issue. However, study sessions or outdoor classrooms require shelter from vehicular traffic and construction sounds (Figure 6).

**Green Elements**

Trees and other landscaped features are important in creating comfortable and aesthetically pleasing outdoor gathering spaces. As identified in the Campus Planning Framework, one of the strengths of campus is its natural beauty. However, diminishing green spaces and the lack of trees, shrubs, and flowers were also identified as campus weaknesses (The University of Iowa, 1998).

Trees provide a shady place to sit, thereby expanding user choice. Green elements work to create an inviting atmosphere. All existing green elements should be preserved in both present spaces and those developed in the future.

**Sunshine and Shade**

Outdoor campus users enjoy the warmth of the sun, especially in the cooler seasons. Some shade is necessary to provide shelter from the sun on hot days, but a space that is completely sheltered from sunlight at all times of the day will not be a successful space year round. The best gathering spaces on campus are open to the sun, with well-established trees and green elements interspersed within them. These spaces provide both sunshine and shade options for campus users.

**OBSERVATIONS OF GATHERING SPACES**

**Methodology**

The following four questions were addressed in this research study:

- Where are people gathering on campus?
- For what purposes are they gathering?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of these spaces?
What types of improvements could be made to these spaces to meet user needs better?

Research was based on personal observations made on the east and near west sides of campus in areas representing the highest volumes of weekday outdoor activity. On the east side, observations were made between the Iowa River and Clinton Street, including the Old Capitol Functional Area and the East Side Residence Halls. On the west side, observations covered the Arts Campus and the West Side Residence Halls. These areas were chosen because they contain the majority of outdoor student activity.

From September to November of 2003, observations were made from noon to one o’clock and three to five o’clock on random weekday afternoons. These two time periods correspond to the typical lunch period and break following afternoon classes and therefore capture the peak outdoor activity times on campus.

A multitude of outdoor uses were observed. To simplify the data, observations were grouped into the following four activity types:

- **Active or Recreational Uses**: Football, Frisbee, or other games, sports, and activities, not including organized collegiate sports on the far west campus.
- **Informal Gatherings**: Group study, relaxation, or conversation that is not part of a scheduled class.
- **Non-Social Activities**: Solo study, relaxation or cell phone conversation.
- **Outdoor Classrooms**: Formal class or discussion meetings held outdoors.

Users who were passing by—jogging, biking, skating, and walking—were not recorded. These activities move across campus and therefore cannot be associated with one specific campus location. All observations were noted on log sheets and recorded in Microsoft Excel (Appendix A). Logs included the date and time, the location and type of activity, and the number of participants.

**Results**

Map 1 shows the number of users observed at each location. Some gathering spaces are clearly more popular than others. For example, users were consistently seen gathering on the Pentacrest during every observation period. Activity type was also consistent among spaces. For instance, the Pentacrest was consistently used for study
and outdoor classrooms whereas more active uses were seen in the Quadrangle Courtyard. Appendix B contains a campus building location map for reference.
Observed gathering spaces fit into the following three categories:

- **Successful Gathering Spaces**: Users were consistently observed.
- **Underused Gathering Spaces**: Very few users were observed, but most of these spaces have the potential to attract more activity.
- **Potential Gathering Spaces**: No users were observed, but these spaces have unique features that could make them popular gathering spaces.

Each space within these categories was analyzed based upon the four identified components of successful gathering spaces—seating infrastructure; access, location, and noise; green elements; and a mix of sun and shade. Recommendations for improvements were then made based on this analysis. Successful gathering spaces had a combination of these components tailored to the space’s primary uses. Underused and potential gathering spaces were missing vital components and therefore not meeting user needs.

**DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Successful Gathering Spaces: East Campus**

The East Campus covers 96.5 acres and is an “urban environment” close to the downtown with a traditional grid system of streets, pedestrian pathways, and building arrangements (The University of Iowa, 1998). Buildings are compact on this side of the Iowa River, and there are few green spaces east of the Pentacrest. The Campus Planning Framework states that existing open spaces should be preserved on the east side because the development of new large open spaces is not possible or practical here (The University of Iowa, 1998).

The majority of undergraduate classes are located on the east side of campus, as well as five dormitories, the Iowa Memorial Union, and Hubbard Park. Therefore, the east side of campus has high volumes of pedestrian traffic. Due to east campus’s shared border with downtown Iowa City, users here include many non-university residents as well as students, staff, and faculty.

Table 2 summarizes the observations made on the east side of campus according to the four identified components of successful spaces—seating infrastructure; access, location and noise; green elements; and sunshine and shade.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering Space</th>
<th>Seating Infrastructure</th>
<th>Access/Location/Noise</th>
<th>Green Elements</th>
<th>Sun/Shade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Library North Entrance</td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>A major pathway for most users</td>
<td>Few adjacent trees</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Close to central campus</td>
<td>Little green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some noise from Madison Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Hall</td>
<td>One bench</td>
<td>A major pathway for east side residence halls</td>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>Sheltered from traffic noise</td>
<td>Hedges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burge Front Entrance</td>
<td>Berches</td>
<td>Major pathway for dorm residents</td>
<td>Hedges between ledges and buildings</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>A lot of noise from Clinton Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentacrest</td>
<td>Fences</td>
<td>The most travelled path on campus</td>
<td>Lots of shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges and stairs on buildings</td>
<td>Ideal location - the center of campus</td>
<td>Abundant landscaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic noise from adjacent streets</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips Hall</td>
<td>Circular benches</td>
<td>On a major pedestrian pathway</td>
<td>Shade trees in center of benches</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>Adjacent to the center of campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stairs</td>
<td>Noise from Clinton Street and Iowa Avenue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Space</td>
<td>Seating Infrastructure</td>
<td>Access/Location/Noise</td>
<td>Green Elements</td>
<td>Sun/Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Anne Cleary Walkway</td>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>A major pedestrian pathway</td>
<td>Little between Jefferson and Market Streets</td>
<td>Mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tables between Calvin and Trowbridge Halls</td>
<td>Ideal location near the center of campus</td>
<td>Abundant between Market Street and Burge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>Sheltered from traffic noises</td>
<td>Little between Burge and North Hall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currier Front Entrance</td>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>Major path for east side residents</td>
<td>Shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tables with benches</td>
<td>Convenient for Currier residents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>Noise from Clinton Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMU Bridge and River Path</td>
<td>Benches along river path</td>
<td>A major pedestrian pathway</td>
<td>Shade trees behind IMU</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tables with seats on WheelRoom patio</td>
<td>Close to central campus</td>
<td>Landscaping near IMU bridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stone benches, ledges near IMU bridge</td>
<td>Sheltered from most traffic noises</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastside Campus Stops</td>
<td>No benches at many stops</td>
<td>All stops are along major pathways</td>
<td>Most stops contain trees or other green elements</td>
<td>Mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some ledges</td>
<td>Traffic noise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following recommendations are based on the observations made in Table 2, William H. Whyte’s recommendations regarding successful spaces, and personal experiences in these spaces.

**Main Library North Entrance & Plaza**

The Main Library north entrance and plaza is a key gathering space on campus. This space carries a significant amount of traffic and is located between the Main Library and the Becker Communication Studies Building and new journalism building (Figure 7).

Observations:

- The plaza near the Main Library North Entrance is a major pathway for most campus users.
- This area draws users from the Main Library, Becker Communication Studies Building, and English & Philosophy Building. Users of the new journalism building will also use this area.
- The Main Library North Entrance is used primarily for informal and non-social activities
- There is little formal seating infrastructure, but there are ledges that serve as informal seating.
- There are few green elements and shaded locations in this space.

Recommendations:

- Benches and more formal seating spaces should be added to this area.
- Additional green elements such as planters would create a more inviting space to gather in.
North Hall

The space around the main entrance to North Hall is another successful gathering space on campus. It is well removed from traffic noise from Clinton Street and is along a major east side pedestrian corridor (Figure 8).

Observations:

- There is a combination of formal and informal seating infrastructure.
- There is a combination of trees and hedges in this space.
- There are sunny and shaded spots. However, there is more sun in the morning hours.

Recommendations:

- This space works well as it currently exists. One or two more benches could be added, but are not critical.

Burge Front Entrance

This is a key gathering space for students living in Burge Residence Hall as well as those employed in the building. This space is located between Burge Hall and Clinton Street, and is intersected by a sidewalk (Figure 9).

Figure 8. The main entrance of North Hall provides informal and formal seating options, as well as a mix of sun and shade. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)

Figure 9. The front entrance of Burge primarily serves students living in the residence halls with a mixture of benches and ledges. (Photos: Matt Chambers)
Observations:

- Ledges, as well as one bench, are used as seating areas.
- There is a mix of shade and sun in this space, and an awning also serves to protect people from poor weather conditions.
- There is significant noise pollution in this space from Clinton Street and pedestrian activity.
- This space is linear with little room to expand or be reconfigured.

Recommendations:

- This location works well as a gathering space given the limitations in layout and expansion room.
- The informal seating structure works well, and we would not recommend additional benches due to space constraints.
- Softer green elements could replace the existing hedges located between the ledges and the buildings to create a more inviting space.

**Pentacrest**

For the purposes of this study, the Pentacrest was divided into four quadrants, as shown in Map 2.

![Map 2](image)

**Map 2.** Pentacrest Quadrants 1, 2, 3, and 4, as used in this study. (Base map obtained from Iowa State Geologic Map Server, ortho.gis.iastate.edu)
Observations:

- Quadrants 1 and 2 have similar characteristics and attract similar uses, as do Quadrants 3 and 4.
- Quadrants 3 and 4 are used less compared to Quadrants 1 and 2. This may be attributable to the sloped terrain of Quadrants 3 and 4, and also because Quadrants 1 and 2 are closer to downtown Iowa City.
- Although most gatherings occur on the lawns, the steps and ledges of Shaeffer Hall, MacBride Hall, and the Old Capitol are commonly used for social gatherings, outdoor classrooms, and informal study (Figure 10).

![Figure 10](image-url)

**Figure 10.** Clockwise from top—the east Pentacrest Lawns, the northwest Pentacrest, students gathering on the steps of MacLean Hall, an outdoor classroom gathering west of MacLean Hall. (Photos: Erin Welsch)

Recommendations:

- As described in the Campus Planning Framework, "The Pentacrest is the historic heart of the University and the central focal point of the main
campus.” “The Pentacrest, its surroundings, and the view corridors that frame it, representing the beginnings of the University and campus development, must be preserved and protected.” (The University of Iowa, 1998)

- The lawns of the Pentacrest provide a green space that aesthetically complements the University’s most prominent structures. These lawns are best maintained as unobstructed green space, and they seem to adequately meet user needs as they are. Structural changes or additions are not recommended.

**Phillips Hall**

Located east of the Pentacrest, the gathering space at the front entrance of Phillips Hall is consistently used and has an appropriate mix of key components. It is also adjacent to a major pedestrian pathway along Clinton Street and Iowa Avenue (Figure 11).

**Figure 11.** Circular benches and shade trees at the Phillips Hall entrance provide comfortable seating options. (Photo: Erin Welsch)

Observations:

- There is significant traffic noise from Iowa Avenue and Clinton Street.
- The majority of activity here is non-social or informal.
- There is a good combination of formal and informal seating here, including circular benches, ledges, and stairs.
- This location has an ideal mix of shade and sun with large shade trees in the centers of the circular benches

Recommendations:

- This is a very good example of a successful gathering space, and we suggest that this be used as a model for other spaces on campus.
**T. Anne Cleary Walkway**

The T. Anne Cleary Walkway is a linear gathering space and key pedestrian pathway in the center of east campus. The walkway has two distinct sections—between Jefferson and Market Streets and between Market Street and Burge Hall (Figure 12).

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 12.** The T. Anne Cleary Walkway is a major pedestrian pathway on the east campus. The section between Jefferson and Market Streets contains benches, tables, and railings, but seating options are more limited between Market Street and Burge Residence Hall. (Photos: Matt Chambers)

Observations:

- A variety of uses are found here including non-social activities and informal gatherings.
- Benches and ledges along the edges of the space allow for informal gatherings off the pedestrian path.
- Additional seating and tables are located between Calvin and Trowbridge Halls.
- The T. Anne Cleary Walkway is one of the noisier gathering spaces on campus. Noise comes from traffic on Jefferson and Market Streets as well as from the pedestrian traffic traveling through the space.
- Green elements are abundant in the section between Market Street and Burge Hall. However, there are few green elements in the space between Jefferson and Market Streets.
- The linear nature of the space creates a strong visual corridor towards the Old Capitol as people face southward.
Recommendations:

- Benches placed parallel to major pedestrian pathways often lack privacy. To create more private and inviting gathering spaces, new benches should be placed perpendicular to the pedestrian path.
- The visual corridor to the Old Capitol should not be disrupted.
- The green elements in the section between Burge Hall and Market Street should be preserved.

**Currier Front Entrance**

As with the Burge Front entrance, this is a key gathering space for students living in Currier Residence Hall as well as those employed in the building (Figure 13). This space is located between Currier Hall and Clinton Street, and is adjacent to a Cambus stop.

![Figure 13. Benches, tables, ledges, and chairs make the Currier front entrance a popular gathering space for east side residents.](Image)

Observations:

- Non-social and informal gatherings are taking place here.
- There is a good mix of formal and informal seating including benches, tables, ledges, and stairs.
- There is significant noise at this location from traffic on Clinton Street.
- There is an ideal mix of sun and shade with trees serving as primary green elements.

Recommendations:

- Existing green elements should be preserved, and additional green elements in this space would be welcome.
- This space works well, and it is recommended that this type of gathering space be replicated when possible.
Iowa Memorial Union Bridge and River Path

The Iowa Memorial Union Bridge and River Path is a linear space along the east bank of the Iowa River (Figure 14). It serves as a pathway from the IMU to Iowa Avenue. The main focal point of this space is the Iowa River.

Figure 14. The IMU is a central hub for student activity on campus. User needs are accommodated by a wide variety of seating options including benches, tables, ledges, and green space. (Photos: Jessica Hlubek)

Observations:

- There are a variety of uses in this gathering space. It is a location for non-social activity, informal gatherings, and active uses.
- There are benches along the river path as well as ledges near the IMU. The benches along the path face the river to emphasize it as a focal point.
- Benches with tables are located adjacent to this space on the IMU’s WheelRoom patio.
- This space is close to central campus while also being sheltered from most traffic noises.
- There is a mix of sunny and shaded spaces within this location.

Recommendations:

- Additional shade trees could be placed near the benches, or additional benches could be placed near shade trees.
This would be an ideal location for new public art projects. Incorporating one or two sturdy sculptures here would increase the pleasant atmosphere of the space.

**Eastside Cambus Stops**

There are Cambus stops that work better than others on the east side, but for the most part all of these stops are similar in their existing components and use types.

Observations:

- The Cambus stops on the east side have little or no formal seating (Figure 15).
- The level of green elements at each bus stop varies. Primarily, green elements at bus stops consist of large shade trees.
- There is a significant level of noise at all of these spaces from the traffic on adjacent roads.

Recommendations:

- One or two benches should be placed at the Cambus stop on the east side of the Main Library, on the north side of MacBride, and at the stop next to the Gamma Phi Beta house across from Currier. There is not even informal seating at these locations and large numbers of people gather here.
- The addition of green elements, including trees and planters, should be considered for many of these stops. The addition of green elements will soften the spaces visually as well as absorb some of the noise pollution.
Successful Gathering Spaces: West Campus

The west side of campus covers 654.3 acres, not including the area west of Mormon Trek Boulevard or the Oakdale Campus (The University of Iowa, 1998). It is less urban in character than the east side and has a looped road system and building pattern. It borders residential neighborhoods rather than a downtown area. Buildings on the west side of the river are less dense (with the exception of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics) and surrounded by significant green spaces.

The west side is home to the Arts Campus, five residence halls, the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC), and sports venues such as Kinnick Stadium and Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Most medical, art, theatre, physical education, and law-related courses are located on the west side. Few core undergraduate classes are held here. Although the UIHC houses a huge number of employees, practitioners, and medical students, there are not nearly as many people seen traveling from place to place as on the east side of the campus.

Although the west side residence halls and Cambus stops have similar usage patterns to those on the west side, they have very different surroundings and therefore require separate consideration. Table 3 summarizes the observations made on the west side of campus. The table includes key observations regarding usage types and the four identified criteria—seating infrastructure; access, location and noise; green elements; and sunshine and shade.
### TABLE 3. COMPONENTS OF OBSERVED WEST SIDE GATHERING SPACES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering Space</th>
<th>Seating Infrastructure</th>
<th>Access/Location/Noise</th>
<th>Green Elements</th>
<th>Sun/Shade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Iowa River Corridor Trail (IRCT)** | Benches near most buildings along trail  
Interactive sculpture near Art Museum | Multiple gathering spaces conveniently located off of the IRCT  
Sheltered from vehicular traffic and related noise  
Ideal location for students on the Arts Campus | Large variety of shade trees  
Open green spaces | Ideal mix |
| **Hillcrest Courtyard** | Benches in a circular pattern  
Landscaped ledges within and around courtyard edges  
Benches near Byington Road | Along major pathway for West Side dorm residents  
Some traffic noise from Grand Avenue  
Frequent emergency vehicle noises from UIHC | A few large shade trees  
Abundant landscaping  
Open green space along edges | Ideal mix |
| **Quadrangle Courtyard** | No benches  
Steps/Ledge near Quad back door | Best access for Quad/Hillcrest Residents  
Sheltered from most traffic noise  
Frequent emergency vehicle noises from UIHC | A few large shade trees  
Open green space | Ideal mix |
| **Rienow Tables** | Sturdy metal benches and tables | Convenient for Rienow and Quadrangle residents  
Significant traffic noise from Grand Avenue  
Frequent emergency vehicle noise from UIHC | Adjacent large shade trees  
Small, new trees planted along street  
Adjacent green space | Ideal mix |
| **Cambus Stops** | Rienow stop contains metal benches and stairs  
Sater stop only has stairs | All stops are along major pathways  
Traffic noise is inevitable | All three stops contain shade trees  
Rienow stop contains other landscaped features | Ideal mix |
The following recommendations are based on the observations made in Table 3. As with the east side gathering spaces, they are also based upon William H. Whyte’s recommendations regarding successful spaces, and personal experiences on the west campus.

**Iowa River Corridor Trail**

The Iowa River Corridor Trail (IRCT) runs through Iowa City along the Iowa River from City Park to Napolean Park (Figure 16). This trail provides an important connection along the length of the Arts Campus. The IRCT is a strong linear element within the University of Iowa campus. It draws attention to the Iowa River, a key natural feature and symbol of the University and Iowa City.

![Figure 16. Scenes from the Iowa River Corridor Trail. Clockwise from top left—pedestrian just north of the Burlington Street Bridge, inline skaters east of the Art Building near the IMU Bridge, studying in the grass east of the Theatre Building, resting east of Hancher Auditorium, the Hancher Green, and a family gathering near the Art Museum. (Photos: Jessica Hlubek)](image)

Observations:

- The IRCT is among the most popular of the west side gathering spaces.
- The IRCT is used primarily for activities such as walking, jogging, skating, and biking. These uses were not recorded or included in our study.
- Benches and other common stopping points are located along the IRCT that allow for informal gatherings, outdoor classrooms, or non-social activities.
- Observed activity was concentrated at five locations along the trail—just north of the Burlington Street Bridge, east of the Art Building near the Iowa Memorial Union Bridge, east of the Theatre Building, east of Hancher Auditorium, and on the Hancher Green.
- All four defined use types were observed along the IRCT.

Figure 17. The interactive sculpture near the Art Museum provides an interesting place to sit, but other sculptures along the trail are not designed as comfortable seating options. (Photos: Jessica Hlubek)

Recommendations:
- The interactive sculpture near the Art Museum works well, but others provide no seating options. New sculptures along the trail should be encouraged to incorporate additional seating options (Figure 17).
- Benches are placed at regular intervals near the Hancher Green, but are sporadically placed, or absent, at other areas along the trail. Benches are especially needed between the Iowa Memorial Union Bridge and the Burlington Street Bridge. As an alternative, the interactive sculpture theme could be extended south to the Burlington Street Bridge.
- To ensure users understand that interactive art is meant to be used as a seating option, plaques could be placed near the art, explaining its origin and purpose.
**Hillcrest Courtyard**

The Courtyard is located in front of Hillcrest’s main entrance and contains several benches in a paved circular area (Figure 18). There are landscaped islands within the paved area and at the entrances to the seating area. The Hillcrest Courtyard is a well-designed addition to Hillcrest Residence Hall. Its placement and features make it obvious to users that it is to be used as a gathering space. The benches and other features that have been placed here seem to adequately meet the needs of those who use this space.

**Observations:**

- This is a popular space for informal gatherings and non-social activity, especially around meal times.
- The majority of users here used the space to talk, smoke, eat lunch, study, or wait for friends and visitors.
- The area is not designed to accommodate active or recreational uses.

**Recommendations:**

- The leftover green space around the edges of the Courtyard should be preserved. Many residents still use this green space as a place to sunbathe or study. This available choice in seating helps to make the courtyard a popular gathering space.

**Quadrangle Courtyard**

The Quadrangle Courtyard is located just across Byington Avenue from Hillcrest and is enclosed within the three main wings of Quadrangle Residence Hall. This space contains no benches or seating areas, just a large grassy area crossed by pedestrian walkways. It also contains two sand volleyball courts (Figure 19).
Observations:

- This space is a recreational gathering space, primarily used for active uses such as Frisbee or volleyball.
- Many students also use the courtyard as a study area or a place to sunbathe and relax with friends.

Recommendations:

- The Residence Services West Campus Master Plan identifies the need to "increase the quality and quantity of outdoor seating areas" (University of Iowa, 1998). However, the absence of tables and benches does not seem to hurt the Quadrangle Courtyard as a gathering space. These elements would be used if established in this area, but such constructed features would interfere with recreational uses and would completely change the character of this space.
- Any future benches, chairs, and tables should be limited to the corners or periphery of the courtyard to avoid limiting the space as a recreational area.
- Although shade trees are present within this space, other landscaped elements would add more variety and make this space even more inviting to users. Like seating infrastructure, these elements should be limited to the corners and periphery of the courtyard.

**Rienow Tables**

There is a patio located to the east of Rienow Residence Hall containing twelve tables with attached benches. This small space stands out as an example of a very simple structured gathering space (Figure 20).
Observations:

- Throughout the observation period, students were seen here studying, eating lunch, or talking with friends.

Recommendations:

- This is a simple and intimate constructed gathering space and could easily be recreated elsewhere on campus, especially in smaller spaces between buildings.

- Tables of the same design are seen near Currier Residence Hall on the east side of campus. They work well at both Rienow and Currier, and should be considered for the other residence halls as well.

**West Side Cambus Stops**

There are five benches located at the Rienow Cambus Stop, but there are none at the Slater stop, or the stop just further east on Grand Avenue (Figure 21). Most students waiting at the Rienow and Slater stops either sit on the residence halls’ steps or wait inside of their doorways.

Observations:

- The west side Cambus stops are similar to the Cambus stops on the east side of campus. There were many users in these spaces, especially on cool or rainy days.
Recommendations:

- Benches similar to those at the Rienow Cambus stop would be a great benefit to the Slater Cambus stop. While many students are comfortable sitting on the stairs, those with disabilities require a more structured place to sit.
- The Cambus stop just east of Slater has no seating infrastructure and is rarely used due to its close proximity to the Slater stop. However, a bench on this corner would benefit the few who choose to catch the Cambus in this location.

Underused Gathering Spaces

In some places, we anticipated observing more gatherings than we did. These spaces lack critical elements needed to meet user needs, and therefore are not as popular as other spaces on campus. Table 4 contains observations of the four identified components in each of these spaces. Recommendations are based upon these observations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering Space</th>
<th>Seating Infrastructure</th>
<th>Access/Location/Noise</th>
<th>Green Elements</th>
<th>Sun/Shade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gibson Square</td>
<td>6 wooden benches</td>
<td>Not a major pedestrian path for everyone</td>
<td>Lots of shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Open Space</td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenient for library users entering from the south</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lots of traffic noise from Burlington and Madison Streets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Library South</td>
<td>4 wooden benches</td>
<td>Not a major pedestrian path for everyone</td>
<td>Adjacent trees</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance</td>
<td>Stairs</td>
<td>Convenient for library users entering from the south</td>
<td>Planters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ledges</td>
<td>Lots of traffic noise from Burlington and Madison Streets</td>
<td>Landscaped ledges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindquist Center Patio</td>
<td>Backless benches arranged in</td>
<td>Not a major pedestrian path for everyone</td>
<td>Almost none</td>
<td>Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>groups of three</td>
<td>Convenient for users of the Lindquist Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Traffic noise primarily from Madison Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamans Center Patio</td>
<td>Ledge-like seats along Capitol</td>
<td>Good access to ledges; poor access to patio area</td>
<td>None on top</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Street</td>
<td>Close to central campus, but not a major pathway</td>
<td>Lots of trees, bushes on lower</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>patio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metal benches on lower patio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stairs</td>
<td>Little noise from Capitol Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PappaJohn Courtyard</td>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>Poor access due to fence on Jefferson Street</td>
<td>Lots of shade trees</td>
<td>Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive Art</td>
<td>Ideal location in central campus</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively low noise levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Space</td>
<td>Seating Infrastructure</td>
<td>Access/Location/Noise</td>
<td>Green Elements</td>
<td>Sun/Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quad Ravine</td>
<td>Stone benches</td>
<td>Frequented path for Quadrangle residents and medical students</td>
<td>Shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stone ledges</td>
<td>Convenient to west side residents and students</td>
<td>Many ill-maintained green elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some hospital noise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Gibson Square**

Gibson Square is located on the corner of Madison and Burlington Streets in front of the Main Library. Students walking from the west side residence halls often use the pedestrian pathway crossing this space. There are six wooden benches located here among numerous shade trees (Figure 22).

**Observations:**

- This space is not heavily used, but some students were seen here studying and participating in informal gatherings.

**Recommendations:**

- This is a well-constructed and aesthetically pleasing space, but is not along a well-traversed path for most students. It should be maintained as it is and continue to serve library patrons entering from the south.
- There are possibilities for this space to be used as a structured outdoor classroom site. However, traffic noises from Madison and Burlington Streets might prevent this.

**Main Library South Entrance**

The south entrance of the Main Library contains benches, planters, and adjacent green elements. However, there is a lot of empty pavement in the middle of this space that gives it a cold appearance (Figure 23).

**Figure 22.** Gibson Square acts as a park-like setting in front of the Main Library. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)

**Figure 23.** The south entrance of the Main Library would benefit from additional green elements. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)
Observations:
- On few occasions, library patrons were seen here reading, waiting, or talking on cellular phones.

Recommendations:
- More benches could be added to facilitate user needs while still maintaining an open access point to the library.
- More planters or landscaped ledges could be added to this space to soften its appearance.

**Lindquist Center Patio**

This space is located underneath the Lindquist Center along Madison Street. This is a well-constructed space that is adequately sheltered from the weather. It contains backless wooden benches and metal sculptures that create a unique character (Figure 24).

Observations:
- The few users observed were reading the paper or studying.

Recommendations:
- The benches here are old and uncomfortable. Newer wooden or metal benches of a more modern design could allow for more comfortable seating options while maintaining the character of the space.
- This space severely lacks green elements. It has a cold and uninviting appearance that would be softened with planters, trees, or other landscaped elements.
- Planters and ledges could be designed to double as seating options.
- This space is close to central campus and relatively blocked from traffic noises. It could be therefore be used as a structured outdoor classroom.

*Figure 24. The Lindquist Center Patio contains numerous benches, but a lack of green elements makes this space uninviting to users. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)*
**Seamans Center Patio**

The patio to the south of the Seamans Center for the Engineering Arts and Sciences has two components. There is a paved area along Capitol Street, and a patio just behind this space at a lower elevation. The top patio is a flat, paved surface containing ledges that double as seats and stairs leading to the lower patio. The lower patio contains benches and various landscaped elements (Figure 25).

![Seamans Center Patio Image](image)

**Figure 25.** The top patio at the Seamans Center lacks green elements and formal seating. The lower patio contains both, but is screened from pedestrian view by a wall. (Photos: Jessica Hlubeck)

Observations:

- Not many users were observed in these spaces.
- Those present were relaxing, studying, or participating in other non-social activities.

Recommendations:

- The wall separating the top and lower patios shields the lower patio from pedestrian view. It gives the sense that the lower patio is a private space meant for engineering students. By opening this space to pedestrian view, it would act as more of a public space.
- Benches or more comfortable seating on the top patio could increase its use by those exiting Old Capitol Mall or passing by on Capitol Street.
- The top patio lacks green elements. Planters or landscaping similar to that found on the lower patio would make the top patio more inviting and work to connect the two spaces.
**Pappajohn Courtyard**

The Pappajohn Courtyard contains some benches, but is unique because it also has “interactive art”. The courtyard is subject to shade during most times of the day. This space will therefore be used more in the summertime, when students are seeking a refuge from the hot sun. During the cooler seasons, a sunny space is more desirable, and students will chose a different space over the Pappajohn Courtyard. (Figure 26)

![Image of Pappajohn Courtyard](image)

*Figure 26. The Pappajohn Courtyard is a shady green space containing a mixture of seating options. However, the predominant shade and misunderstood “interactive art” make this space somewhat unpopular. (Photos: Jessica Hlubek)*

**Observations:**

- The John Pappajohn Business Building’s courtyard is an area where much more activity was anticipated than was actually observed.
- People in this space were participating in non-social activities such as reading or studying.

**Recommendations:**

- Although the interactive art is designed to provide seating, it is not being used for this. This may be due to users misunderstanding the art’s intended use, and also because the concrete block design is not the most inviting for seating. Incorporating more traditional seating areas with tables would make this a more valuable gathering space with a wider variety of seating options.
- The gates and fences surrounding the courtyard may not be inviting to people who are not business students. Unless a student has class within the business building or passes through the courtyard, they may not feel welcome within
this space. Removing the fences or widening the gates along Jefferson Street and the T. Anne Cleary Walkway would open this space up to more pedestrians and make the courtyard appear as more of a public space.

- This site is relatively quiet and has an ideal location in the center of campus. Given appropriate infrastructure, it would be an ideal setting for a formal outdoor classroom.

**Quad Ravine**

The Quad Ravine is a wooded path area located between Quadrangle Residence Hall and the Bowen Science Building. There are numerous stone benches and many green elements here. (Figure 27)

![Quad Ravine Image]

*Figure 27. The Quad Ravine has a natural appearance due to the wooded surroundings and rustic stone benches. (Photos: Jessica Hlubek)*

**Observations:**

- Only on one occasion was a student seen here studying.

**Recommendations:**

- The stone benches emit a historic character, but they are falling apart and therefore do not have an inviting appearance. They could either be restructured with the same stone materials, or replaced with new benches.

- The presence of numerous trees and green elements make this an aesthetically pleasing place to pass through, but does not call out for users to stop and spend some time. The flowers, bushes and shrubs have a wild and natural appearance, but also appear unkempt. By cleaning up the vegetation and adding mulch or decorative rock, the landscape would look less wild and more inviting.
Potential Gathering Spaces or Outdoor Classrooms

Gatherings were not observed in the potential gathering spaces on campus due to lack of access or seclusion. However, these spaces have unique characteristics that warrant them for consideration. The more secluded spaces especially should be considered for a structured outdoor classroom site. Table 5 contains observations made in these spaces according to each of the four identified components.

The following map shows the areas we have designated as potential outdoor classroom locations. These areas were identified not only due to their proximity to classroom areas but also by the four components for successful gathering places.

Map 3. Locations of suggested outdoor classrooms. (Base map obtained from Iowa State Geologic Map Server, ortho.gis.iastate.edu)

Map 3. Locations of suggested outdoor classrooms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gathering Space</th>
<th>Seating Infrastructure</th>
<th>Access/Location/Noise</th>
<th>Green Elements</th>
<th>Sun/Shade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Street Pedestrian Walkway</td>
<td>Ledges present near Lindquist Center</td>
<td>A major pathway for some users</td>
<td>Lots of shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Close to central campus</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some noise from Madison Street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology Courtyard</td>
<td>Currently in construction zone</td>
<td>A major pathway for some users</td>
<td>Shade trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Close to central campus</td>
<td>Potential for future landscaping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some noise from Iowa Avenue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Side of Iowa Advanced Technology Laboratories</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not a major pathway; secluded</td>
<td>Lots of medium-sized trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Close to central campus</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiet, low noise levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arboretum</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not a major pathway; secluded</td>
<td>Large variety of trees</td>
<td>Ideal mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Convenient for east side residence halls</td>
<td>Open green space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Quiet, low noise levels</td>
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**College Street Pedestrian Walkway**

This space exists between the Lindquist Center and the Seamans Center (Figure 28). A plan for this space by RDG Cross-Gardner Associates names it the “College Street Pedestrian Walkway” (University of Iowa, 1998). This plan includes bicycle parking, light poles, benches, trees, decorative paving, and bollards for this space.

![College Street Pedestrian Walkway](image)

*Figure 28.* Although students gather on the pathway alongside the Lindquist Center, the green space between Lindquist and the Seamans Center is not used for gatherings. (Photos: Erin Welsch)

**Observations:**

- Currently, this space is used relatively infrequently for informal gatherings and non-social activities.
- This space has a prime location on the east central campus, but is at too steep of a grade for recreational uses.

**Recommendations:**

- The path that leads through this space from Capitol Street to Madison Street is a good start to a pedestrian plaza. This space could easily be redesigned to include paved, terraced areas with tables and benches, similar to the features included in the existing plan.
- Redesigning this area would give campus users an additional space to study or eat lunch outside of the Lindquist Center or Seamans Center.
Biology Building Courtyard

There is a prime open space situated between Phillips Hall, the Biological Sciences Building, and the Biology Library. This space is currently blocked by construction work, but has a courtyard-like quality that could adequately serve all three adjacent buildings. (Figure 29)

Observations:

- There is currently no user activity in this space due to construction barricades.

Recommendations:

- When construction is completed, this would be an ideal space for a new constructed courtyard, similar in nature to the Pappajohn Courtyard or the Hillcrest Courtyard, but without fences or barriers.
- With adequate seating infrastructure, this space could be used as a place to study before class, socialize with friends, or even attend an outdoor biology class.

West Side of Iowa Advanced Technology Laboratories

There is a significant amount of secluded green space behind the Iowa Advanced Technology Laboratories (IATL). This space lies along the Iowa River, and is only seen by those traveling along the river path on the east side, or the Iowa River Corridor Trail on the west side of campus. (Figure 30)

Figure 29. When construction on the biology complex is complete, this area would be an ideal structured gathering space. (Photo: Erin Welsch)

Figure 30. This space is secluded and quiet, containing green space and trees. It would be an ideal outdoor classroom setting. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)
Observations:

- Although campus users were occasionally seen walking on the trail behind the IATL, there were no observed users of this green space.

Recommendations:

- There is no seating infrastructure here, but tables or benches would be a welcome addition for those who walk the trail or frequently use the IATL.
- This site is secluded, but is easily accessible from the main buildings on campus. This site would be best used as a formal outdoor classroom area.
- Other users might visit the area for lunch or study, but would have to first be aware of its presence.

**Arboretum**

The Hillside Arboretum is located along the east side of the Iowa River, just below the President’s residence. This area has abundant green space in a quiet and highly aesthetic setting. (Figure 31)

Observations:

- A few non-social and recreational gatherings were observed here.
- A lot of students are probably unaware of this space due to its secluded location.

Recommendations:

- Although this area should not be disturbed with large amounts of infrastructure, it could be an ideal site for a small constructed space suitable for an outdoor classroom. Such a classroom need not consist of more than some benches arranged in a linear or circular fashion.
- This space is quieter than most locations, yet close enough to the main campus for classes to be held here if planned in advance.

*Figure 31. The Hillside Arboretum is a highly aesthetic space, containing numerous trees and a view of the Iowa River. (Photo: Jessica Hlubek)*
• The bench space could be used for other activities as well during non-classroom periods.

CONCLUSIONS

The University of Iowa is fortunate to have abundant green spaces and other gathering spaces accessible along primary pedestrian pathways. There are many spaces on both the east and west sides of campus that attract campus users through a combination of appropriate seating infrastructure; a central location, easy access points, and low noise levels; aesthetic green elements; and a mix of sun and shade. These spaces are successful because they tailor these elements to the space’s intended uses, not because they maximize every element. Successful gathering spaces provide both the University population and community residents with memorable places to study, relax, or socialize. They serve as models to strengthen the underused and potential future outdoor gathering spaces on campus.

Strengthening the character of underused spaces and creating new gathering spaces will draw attention to the outdoor resources the University of Iowa has to offer. Given the increased attention, campus users will be more likely to interact with the outdoor campus environment. Through active participation in their environment, they will be able to identify more strongly with the spaces around them, and therefore develop their own sense of place on campus.

Because University populations, as well as campus use patterns, are in a continual state of flux, the spaces on campus need to be observed frequently. By being actively aware of how students and other are using the campus’s outdoor gathering spaces, it can be assured that these spaces are adequately meeting the present and future needs of campus users.
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*Use Codes: 1 - Active Uses  2 - Informal Gathering  3 - Non-Social Activity  4 - Outdoor Classroom*
REFERENCES


ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


This article announces that a new pamphlet of materials is available to help schools establish outdoor classrooms. Their relatively cheap cost and immediate impact make outdoor classrooms a valuable addition to any school. The idea of resource conservation is also presented within the article.


This article discusses the psychological, social, spiritual, and aesthetic benefits of well designed spaces. The author connects the notion of “sense of place” with the atmosphere of a given location. He argues that a place is a social construction that can impact a person in many ways and invoke different emotions and feelings. Changes in technology have affected the built environment by allowing different building techniques and reducing some of the health risks once associated with indoor spaces. In addition, our highly mobile society has changed traditional links of places. Finally, regulations impact the design, construction, and use of certain places more than in the past. All of these things are considerations when looking at ways of increasing a sense of place. Finally, the author discusses the connection between health and a sense of place by suggesting four topics of research—nature, buildings, public spaces, and urban form.


Howe describes a course offered by University of Iowa professors Jim Throgmorton and Barbara Eckstein called “Storytelling and Urban Engagement.” The purpose of the course is to get students engaged in the place where they live. Howe explains how many University of Iowa students do not know much about Iowa City as a place. The article conveys a message central to our project—by hearing stories and learning the history of the area, students find more meaning in their everyday surroundings.


In response to educators’ ideas that school design should complement and enhance student learning, Kennedy provides ten examples of how the way a school is built can help the way a student learns. One of these examples focuses on how outdoor spaces surrounding a school can be seen as learning opportunities. Although some of the
ideas presented in this article are intended for grades K-12, all of the concepts discussed can be applied to college campuses as well.


Layton explains how good design and creative programming can transform outdoor spaces into effective learning environments. The focus of this article is primarily on grades K-12 campuses, although college campuses are mentioned as well. Layton addresses examples of spaces that can be used as outdoor classrooms, ways these spaces can be incorporated into the surrounding community, and methods of funding. He concludes with a helpful list of outdoor learning environment resources.


In his book, Lynch states that the need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is crucial for the use and enjoyment of the city. Therefore, the environmental images within a city must be clear and vivid. Lynch explores the role of environmental images in three US cities through reconnaissance surveys and citizen interviews. Both sources of research identify the same dominant images in five forms—paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Lynch focuses on the role of images in central cities, but his ideas can apply to the smaller, campus scale as well.


This article describes the efforts taken to create a sense of place for college students that commute. This program is called the “Collegia Program”, and was developed on the Seattle University campus. The article describes the reasons why this program was deemed necessary and the vision of what the program will accomplish.


The Soil Conservation Service recently got a new partner in their effort to create outdoor classrooms across the country. The Earth Team, working with the SCS, has the goal of creating an outdoor classroom at every school in the country. They offer opportunities to learn about ecosystems as well as many other topics. The article talks about organizations that help in setting up outdoor classrooms as well as other benefits of doing so.

This article looks at the effects of the physical environment on sense of place. While many places simply consider the social aspects of a sense of place, this article recognizes and emphasizes physical attributes. The characteristics of the environment and human uses of the environment are addressed, as well as how these relate to sense of place.