Introduction

America’s history of conceiving, designing, and building college campuses now stretches back nearly four centuries. This chapter establishes relevant historic contexts for considering buildings and landscapes of the University of Cincinnati campus, including those newer works of signature architecture and landscape architecture, within the national spectrum of campus planning. In this context, the evolution of the University of Cincinnati campus is to be understood as having achieved a unique sense of place with strong local and national significance that is worthy of “preservation.”

Campus Planning in America

Higher education was on the minds of even the earliest American settlers, who in 1640 established Harvard College, basing its design on the English higher education system of centralizing instruction in one complex that served the entire country, as at Oxford and Cambridge. The number of degree-granting institutions in the colonies reached nine by the time of the American Revolution and, by the late 18th century, Americans had broken from the English system to disperse higher education among independent colleges. These were frequently located in rural landscapes with views to natural surroundings that were thought to have a favorable impact on students’ mental and physical health.

The design and planning of early American college buildings were highly diverse. At Harvard, for example, a three-sided open courtyard plan
prevailed while the original scheme for the College of William and Mary formed an Oxford-like enclosed quadrangle, which later developed into one large building flanked by smaller structures. Several colonial colleges operated single large buildings that often had expansive greenswards in front. At Princeton, this green space was created by purposely setting back the building from the road.

Expansion of college campuses in the colonial period often produced very different spatial patterns than those found at English colleges, which tended to be inward-looking, with buildings based around a courtyard. American colleges were extroverted, with separate buildings set in open landscapes. In 1826, Thomas Jefferson initiated a different approach to higher education in the United States. His creation of an “academical village” dedicated to “enlightened dialogue between students and teachers,” with the focal point and largest building designated as the library, suggested a commitment to research and continuing study that previously had not existed at American colleges.1

The years between the 1820s and the present would find all American universities responding to the forces of history and change. In that time, America’s higher education institutions have continued to change in response to increased enrollments, technological advances, and evolving perceptions of the role campus planning should play in influencing pedagogy. Aside from attempting to satisfy physical needs, a continuous thread in campus planning has been the expression and reinforcement of the universities’ symbolic image.2 Some 160 years later, in 1984, this would motivate lead University of Cincinnati administrators and President Joseph A. Steger to seek a visionary plan for a campus that appeared to have grown exponentially without direction. The university would engage contemporary American landscape architect George Hargreaves to re-imagine the campus plan. Cutting-edge architectural and landscape design ideas would provide a forward-looking image for the new campus.3 Some have suggested that, by creating a “Renaissance on the River” campus plan, the university was signaling its commitment to excellence.4

**Early Campus Planning and the Rural Setting**

Between 1820 and the Civil War, American higher education experienced a surge in students whose numbers increased to 800 at all colleges. In keeping with design ideas of the time, the buildings were frequently constructed of stone in a classical style. The Greek-temple form was favored because it expressed democratic ideals of the republic and the role of education. Academic enclaves in the early 19th century were set apart from the local villages or towns that were initially thought to be poor influences on impressionable students, and campuses were designed with picturesque settings. The advantages of rural over urban locations were much debated, and the “college system” was criticized as being too strongly centered on religious affiliation, excessively strict, and elitist. Some complained that colleges were isolated from communities and therefore insulated from the “salutary restraint of public observation.”5 Nevertheless, the idyllic influence of nature was integrated into the design of urban colleges such as Yale, where park-like settings were created as integral components of the building scheme.6 In Cincinnati, an exception to the preference for locating colleges in rural settings was Xavier
University, a Catholic college. Situated on Sycamore Street, Xavier’s urban location tended to evoke a more European character than the Anglo-American system.

Cincinnati College, too, opened in an urban area, close to the pollution of factories, but later moved deliberately out of the downtown basin to the hillside above which was accessible by streetcar, and thence to the hilltop ridge at the edge of a city park. Perhaps because it had begun as an urban institution with strong ties to the city, the University of Cincinnati continued to foster connections with the city, despite its physical removal from its original urban location through the medical school, which provided facilities both for teaching and for serving the population, and through the university’s seminal cooperative education program, which forged a link between education and work experience and remains a renowned and integral part of the university program today.  

University Beautiful and the Beaux Arts Tradition

In the late 19th century, the American higher education system began moving away from the concept of independent colleges and toward a university curriculum and pedagogical philosophy. Initially, Americans emulated the German example of a university as a collection of departmental faculty devoted to scholarship and teaching, usually housed in individual “colleges.” However, the earlier American collegiate tradition had become entrenched to such a degree that “college” and “university” models began to coalesce. What emerged was a highly democratized system that provided education for increasingly larger numbers of students — both men and women — often with very different goals, including technical and liberal arts education, and undergraduate and graduate study. Such diverse interests required a new form of planning. Where the earlier American college had been expressed as a “village,” the new university would be a “city.”

Following the sensation of architect Daniel Burnham’s “White City” at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, universities adopted a “City Beautiful” planning philosophy derived from Beaux Arts principles.
of monumental organization. These included a strong adherence to symmetry, connecting disparate buildings through axial alignments that ran through building interiors and across landscaped spaces, constructing significant buildings at focal points which terminated long axis in the landscape, and employing hierarchical circulation patterns that featured central walkways with secondary routes leading from them.

At the University of Cincinnati, campus planning reflected these national trends and embraced the Beaux Arts design and architectural style for a time. The original linear arrangement of a group of buildings on a knoll or ridge was augmented with buildings constructed in a courtyard or quadrangle arrangement along an intersecting axis. Instead of the eclectic Italianate style of Hannaford’s McMicken Hall, the university employed a classical Beaux Arts aesthetic in grouping Baldwin Hall, Old Chemistry Building, and Swift Hall. These buildings are characterized by their monumentality, with flat roofs and attic stories, colossal columns emphasizing double doorways, dentil moldings on cornices, and limestone banding between stories. Later, Braunstein Hall and Wilson Auditorium would further extend the north side of the quadrangle to link green space to the “Clifton Arc” in front of McMicken Hall and to Clifton Avenue. However, the university was not entirely dedicated to following this model and did not adopt it as its standard.

The Influence of Modern Architecture

Universities in the 20th century gradually came to more closely resemble urban environments, sharing their attendant problems: dense but fluid populations, conflicting land-use patterns, traffic congestion, and diverse (sometimes opposing) interests. Changes in architectural styles and philosophies began to influence the way campus plans developed. The southern Chicago campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology was among the first in the United States to employ modern architecture. Mies van der Rohe’s Crown Hall, his first steel-and-glass campus building from 1956, retained classical ideals in its design and might not, therefore, be considered truly modern in plan. As colleges weighed the pros and cons of introducing modern architecture to their campuses, uncertain of the effect this new style might have on the college image, Frank Lloyd Wright designed the campus of Florida Southern College, a free-flowing campus.
designed the campus of Florida Southern College, a free-flowing campus plan freed from the classical constraints of hierarchical, symmetrical organization and connections. Wright’s architecture was rooted in nature and expressed an organic concern with native materials and forms and with the site. Reflecting on his design for Florida Southern, Wright opined that “[i]n Organic Architecture then, it is quite possible to consider the building as one thing, its furnishing another and its setting and environment still another. The Spirit in which these buildings are conceived sees all these together at work as one thing.”

Organic architectural expression of the importance of individual buildings greatly influenced the planning process. In a move away from the design model where buildings contributed to a unified plan, Joseph Hudnut, chair of the planning department at Harvard University, declared all attempts to bind universities to master plans have been failures. Instead, Hudnut advocated a system of free-flowing “organic” development in which buildings could be conceived as individual components that bore no relation to the general composition of a campus. Insisting that individual architecture was more important than coherent planning, he said: “Let no building depend for its character upon its relocation to another, nor let any of the open spaces be of such absolute proportions that new construction built into them will destroy them.”

This theory of free-flowing development was soon tested as buildings appeared ad-hoc on campuses where there was space for them. Large unconventional building forms for lecture halls, dormitories, and student unions were built to fulfill the needs of increasingly large student populations. Yale’s President A. W. Griswold rejected a coherent university campus style or pattern of development in favor of buildings that created an “effect” and expressed the university’s modern interest in diversity. The university embraced contemporary architects of distinction such as Louis Kahn, Eero Saarinen, Paul Rudolph, and Gordon Bunchaft. At the University of Cincinnati, modernist aesthetic and planning concepts debuted with the construction in 1952 of George Roth and James E. Allen’s Alms Building, and James E. Allen’s the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) wing, built in 1958.

The post-World War II college population boom prompted a building phase at campuses around the country and also resulted in changes in the types of colleges available to prospective students. More young people desiring higher education were also restricted by their economic means, leading to the inauguration of programs catering to students who worked full or part time while also attending classes. This phenomenon produced a proliferation of community college “commuter campuses” in the 1950s and ’60s and affirmed the need for colleges to be located within easy reach of both city centers and suburbs. As a precursor of this trend, the University of Cincinnati’s own Evening College was organized in 1938 and continued until 2002 (individual evening classes had begun as early as 1902).

Physically, these more urban colleges tended to have less land on which to expand, and some grew vertically rather than horizontally. At UC, rapid growth in enrollment through the 1960’s pushed the edges of the campus into the Corryville and Clifton neighborhoods to achieve “superblock” proportions in order to accommodate new housing and surface parking.
In the late 20th and early 21st century, landscape design tended to challenge the intellect and use both existing and invented topography to shape the open spaces that complement the buildings. A 2005 exhibition of new landscapes at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, “Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape,” portrayed these new landscapes as “intelligent sites” with multivalent characteristics encompassing “the physical properties of the ground, its history, and the program for the new landscape.” Landscape architect George Hargreaves is thought to have learned lessons from earth artists like Robert Smithson, sculpting the land into shapes with strong symbolic resonance. At the site of Peter Eisenman’s Aronoff Center, which “cascades down a hill,” Hargreaves formed a series of long mounds that are both sympathetic to the architecture and strongly reminiscent of Ohio’s Indian burial mounds.

This new landscape architecture, like architecture, became more concerned with the expression of the design process. In his early work, Hargreaves, looking for a way beyond the “formulaic language of landscape architecture” that would break from the “reflexive use of the English picturesque for public parks on the one hand, and the reliance on the balanced, asymmetrical geometries of modernism for urban plazas on the other,” found inspiration in contemporary art, specifically sculpture and the repetitive units of minimalist art. Scholars like John Beardsley suggested that Hargreaves found the solution in a more “open-ended” approach that generated design in response to the conditions at a particular site. Beardsley took note of Hargreaves’ discovery that a
particular site. Beardsley took note of Hargreaves’ discovery that a compelling combination of factors, including time, gravity, erosion, human commerce, and the physical properties of all matter could render a landscape “extraordinarily meaningful.” Hargreaves gradually developed a flair for the structural and symbolic use of sculptural form. His landscapes are regarded as settings in which people observe and interact with the elements, where designs establish “visual and physical connections between people and the natural systems within which they live.”

Hargreaves’ University of Cincinnati Master Plan 2000 is an exemplar of his mature work. It takes into consideration the natural forms of the land, draws on these, and emphasizes them to create focal points with additional sculptural landforms. Hargreaves also weaves the landscape between buildings in an attempt to create dynamic spaces that draw the pedestrian from one part of campus to another.

Elsewhere, urban campuses have also been paying more attention to green space, developing plans that include planting large numbers of trees and using landscape to create communal spaces where students can relax, interact, or simply move from one building to the next in a congenial atmosphere. By energizing the density and the vibrancy of their urban locations, colleges and universities are recognizing the need to provide outdoor spaces that give students greater opportunities to interact at a different pace than in the classroom. Around the country, concepts being explored in campus master plans include leveraging historic landscape features to recreate green spaces infused with a sense of tradition; creating spaces that blur the boundaries between interior and exterior and increase the sense of community; and establishing multi-purpose student centers that consolidate amenities and expand options for interaction.

At the Illinois Institute of Technology, an early landscape design will be reinstated with the planting of more than 1,000 trees; at the University of Wisconsin, a new master-planning effort emphasizes the key concept of “urban pedestrian landscapes.” At the University of Cincinnati, the creation of such communal spaces has added to the dynamic nature of the campus. The CCM Village renovation designed by Laurie Olin, for example, received a 2001 Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects for the “imaginative reuse of existing buildings that provides an attractive interior and exterior gathering place for the performing arts.”

Subtle landscape and environmental elements can make extensive, discontinuous campuses cohere into harmonious academic communities. David J. Neuman, University of Virginia architect, espouses a strong planning armature as a key to a successful campus. Neither memorable architecture nor distinctive landscapes by themselves can make a good campus. It is the interplay between the two; the order of the whole that counts. While signature buildings and landscapes have become a high priority among university and public officials, planning — which brings the two together to create a more meaningful place — is paramount. Planning is the key to a comprehensive vision that integrates the physical campus with institutional identity. As Vassar College President Frances Daly Ferguson put it, without planning, “even the most beautifully situated campus can be ruined by poorly located buildings and bad open space.”
Signature Architecture and 21st-Century Campus Planning

At the turn of the 21st century, city planners are expressing new optimism about the ability of large-scale development to reshape and reinvigorate the American urban environment, echoing Daniel Burnham’s famous dictum to “make no little plans.” The success of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilboa, Spain, in attracting visitors and infusing new economic vitality and physical vibrancy in a declining industrial city center, has inspired other cities to give the go-ahead to master plans that include “big name” architectural and landscape designs for large-scale building projects. In the City of Cincinnati there has been a long history of engaging recognized designers to add aesthetic currency and practical amenities conducive to attracting visitors and potential residents to the city. Zaha Hadid’s design for the Contemporary Arts Center is but a recent example. This new attitude toward planning “big” is seen by some as a reinterpretation of Jane Jacobs’ cautionary lessons for creating lively neighborhoods. Other commentators are, naturally, still skeptical about the possibilities inherent in tall towers to create lively streetscapes.21

Trends in campus planning and design around the nation can be understood, in part, as responses to students who have grown up amid revolutionary developments in the sciences and communication technologies and an increasing tendency to integrate disciplines. The 21st century student has high expectations of the built environment. Surveys of visiting students place an attractive and interestingly built environment high on the list of positive attributes of a campus. This is but one of the most visible ways of attracting visitors and students.

Campus development has also come to depend on a broad base of private donors and the development of public–private partnerships to supplement limited state funding. In a climate where cities are doing the same, university planners recognize the importance of “signature” architecture and landscape architecture in attracting both students and donors. It is not coincidental that urban campuses, like the cities they inhabit, are reinventing themselves to project a unique sense of place or “brand identity” that will boost their economies, manage population growth, and exploit local natural and cultural resources.
The University of Cincinnati has, since the 1990's, led the way in using highly expressive architecture and landscapes to help attract top students and funding. This approach is now being employed at schools as diverse as the University of Illinois, the University of Missouri, St. Louis University, the University of Dayton, and Youngstown State University in Ohio. The designers of many of the new buildings at the University of Cincinnati have been recognized as masters of late 20th and early 21st century architecture. Two have been awarded the prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize (Frank Gehry in 1989 and Thom Mayne of Morphosis in 2005). Moore Ruble Yudell Architects received the American Institute of Architects Firm Award for 2006, at which time their work was applauded for “its spirited celebration of habitation at many scales and its respect for people, context, and place.” At UC, although the unifying vision of George Hargreaves’ master plan considered buildings as “infill,” signature architects—chosen on the basis of their reputations as innovative designers—exhibited a notable desire to successfully realize the plan by collaborating both with each other and with Hargreaves. Concepts and designs were shared on an interactive Web site, and architects discussed their progress with one another, ensuring that site and buildings were created in collaboration.

The adoption of cutting-edge design by leading architects has attracted critical notice and popular attention to the University of Cincinnati. Some critics have struggled to classify the styles these designs express. Each building is highly representative of an individual architect’s style. Several of the buildings, in particular Thom Mayne’s Campus Recreation Center, Frank Gehry’s Vontz Center for Molecular Studies, and Peter Eisenman’s Aronoff Center for Design and Art, have been described as both deconstructivist architecture and as expressionist modern — perhaps because, stylistically, they incorporate some of the philosophies of both expressionism and modernism. This new design expression has also been variously called “complex architecture” and an “architecture of movement.” Not only is movement implicit in the building forms, where walls and floors are often angled as if in a state of arrested motion, but curved outer edges also lead the eye to views beyond, and materials direct the eye to views of adjacent or nearby buildings and landscapes.

Individual buildings are also given physical and psychological meaning. Peter Eisenman’s Aronoff Center has been described, for example, as “confronting the curvilinear with the gridded,” and as recording “processes of its own metamorphosis, frozen in time.” Architecture critic Herbert Muschamp of The New York Times described the building at once as “cheerful, bewildering, generous, controlling,” and something that “one works through as if it were an emotional problem.” Michael Sorkin explained the work of Frank Gehry as “informing fantasies of tipped facades and rotating masses, a simulation of instability.” Thom Mayne’s Campus Recreation Center is a multifaceted building that “juxtaposes key components of student life — eating, sleeping, studying, exercising,” and focuses these activities at the center of the campus, an unusual concept given that traditionally, such accommodations have been located on the periphery of campuses. The Campus Recreation Center is understood by Mayne as a connective building that also has a powerful individual presence. According to one critic, it “cannot be fully grasped from any single viewpoint.”

Of all the architects who have designed buildings at UC since 1990, Mayne (and, perhaps, Gehry) is the most difficult to define. Mayne’s approach has
been described as more global in scope, drawing neither from European modernism, American precedents of the last century, nor Asian influences.\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps this is the quintessential message that universities today hope to convey: that they are as diverse as the world itself, offering students and faculty immense possibilities with a global reach. Mayne’s buildings exhibit a “strong family resemblance” with an “explosive energy and angularity in plan and elevation, a demonstrable affection for exposed structure and metallic skins, a joy imposing and then solving complex formal and functional questions.”\textsuperscript{30} The Campus Recreation Center is “an explosive collage of taut muscular shapes in glass and metal” that “impart energy and activity to public spaces that surround and penetrate it.”\textsuperscript{31} By comparison, glass and metal are employed to different effect in the Joseph A. Steger Student Life Center (Moore Ruble Yudell Architects and Planners) to connect interior and exterior spaces both physically and psychologically, working together to provide the interwoven details of the campus plan.\textsuperscript{32} Wide bays and galleries present views toward gardens and terraces, and offer a transparency of the interior to those on the outside.

UC’s signature buildings have attracted critical appraisals and acclaim, and they have contributed to a new campus that is dynamic and engaging. Architecture critic Herbert Muschamp declared that the University of Cincinnati campus has risen to the challenge that also faces contemporary cities which cry out for life once more: “Show us something new. Give us big, urban objects that we can look at, discuss, love or despise.”\textsuperscript{33}

**Significance**

The considerable number of scholarly articles dedicated to the University of Cincinnati Master Plan 2000 in the recognized literature of the design profession, strongly suggests that sufficient research and evaluation have been provided within which to discern the property and its role in the context of 20th- and 21st-century campus planning.

Is the transforming work that has remade UC’s campus significant? The recognized standards for analyzing and evaluating historic or cultural resources strongly suggest that the answer is “yes.” The UC campus is significant for its physical design and construction as it embodies “distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction,” representing the works of those recognized within the design professions as highly esteemed artists; possessing high artistic value in the estimation of critics in the public realm; and representing a significant and distinguishable entity even when its components do not share a consistent level of individual distinction.\textsuperscript{34}

The University of Cincinnati Campus Heritage Plan approaches the question of preserving buildings and landscapes by signature designers:

**Buildings**

- Aronoff Center for Design and Art, Eisenman Architects
- Center for Academic and Research Excellence (CARE)/Edith J. Crawley Building, Studios Architecture
- College-Conservatory of Music, Pei, Cobb Freed and Partners
- Vera Clement Edwards Center, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
- Engineering Research Center, Michael Graves & Associates
- Richard E. Lindner Center, Bernard Tschumi
Significant “mature” or historic buildings also formed the campus before the implementation of the Master Plan 2000 and are important for the ways in which their “force fields” influenced that plan in determining the placement of new buildings and landscapes. These buildings provide the background narrative of the university’s past:

West Campus

- Alms Building
- Van Wormer Hall
- Baldwin Hall
- Old Chemistry Building
- Swift Hall
- Memorial Hall
- Dieterle Vocal Arts
- Braunstein Hall
- Teachers College/Dyer Hall
- Blegen Library
- McMicken Hall
- Tangeman University Center
- University YMCA
- Wilson Auditorium

East Campus

- Health Professions Building

Understanding the physical evolution of the campus within local, regional, and national or international planning and design trends provides a framework for appreciating the heritage to be passed to future generations and for approaching the ongoing need for change in the campus environment. What are the appropriate treatments for the stewardship of the university’s resources? Having said “yes” to the question of significance, we can examine the characteristic features and materials of buildings and landscapes to decide what strategies should be used to address the process of change and adaptation. This is the subject of the University of Cincinnati Campus Heritage Plan.
Endnotes

1 Turner, Campus Planning, An American Tradition, 83.
3 The Dean of the Architecture, Art and Planning program at the University of Cincinnati had a prominent role in suggesting that signature architecture be part of the new visionary plan (see Chapter Two, History).
17 Patricia Alex, September 27, 2006, “Rutgers unveils its makeover visions; Concepts Designed to Spur Discussion.”
20 Ibid.
23 AIA Awards online at www.AIA.org
28 Sarah Amerlor, Architectural Record, October 2006.

Unless otherwise noted all photographs in Chapter 3 are contributed by the University of Cincinnati.