

The Campus Transformed

We'll have to wait a few years before the changes to the University begin to take on an identifiable, cohesive form. But that doesn't mean we can't imagine what an impressive landscape it will become.

Many prospective students make up their minds about a college within mere minutes of setting foot on campus. Like it or not, first impressions are often what ultimately determine if they'll enroll—it's been proven time and again by admissions surveys. Considering that, it's not hard to understand why one of the main goals of the \$200 million transformation of UA's campus is to wow students with an impressive, beautiful and vital landscape for learning. "We will present to students even more reasons to see The University of Akron as their school of preference both academically and from the perspective of their physical surroundings," says President Luis M. Proenza. "It will be a remarkable place to receive an education."

The University has undergone many changes over its nearly 130-year history. In fact, it has always shown a remarkable commitment to continual improvement and

growth, and never fails to amaze returning alumni with unmistakable signs of progress. But never before has such a comprehensive effort been undertaken.

The transformation isn't about individual buildings and isolated projects. It's about a cohesive plan to re-define and unify the Akron campus in whole.

Though each impressive in their own right, the new buildings—namely the Arts & Sciences Building, the Student Union and the Student Recreation and Wellness Center—will be constructed with that larger picture in mind. They'll incorporate the traditional brick and stone that's found in many campus structures, creating familiarity while also taking the

University's architecture into the 21st century with a profusion of glass, steel and modern design.

And open space, rather than being the space "left over," will be maximized and sculpted to create large greens, appealing common

areas, tree-lined walkways and distinguishable gateways into campus.

With the renovations of E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall and most of the resident halls, the transformation has already begun. New construction, street closings and demolition of



Existing

The images shown here and on subsequent pages provide comparative views of how UA's campus will change over the next few years



Proposed College Green from Buchtel Hall

aging facilities commence in early 2000. And while it will be a few years before we see that "larger picture" of a transformed campus emerge, thanks to Ted Curtis, AIA, vice president of capital planning and facilities management, we can still get a glimpse of how it will evolve.

Being a metropolitan campus," says Curtis, "the University has to deal with certain challenges that arise from building around existing streets, buildings of all types—residential, commercial and industrial—and a finite amount of land."

The University of Akron started out in 1870 as one building on a small parcel of land. Since, it's managed to grow a little at a time,

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“We want people to know immediately that they’re on campus ... yet we don’t want them to feel isolated from the city of Akron,” says Ted Curtis, UA’s vice president of capital planning.

acquiring property from the city through purchases and gifts.

“Most campuses started out with a large plot of land, with lots of elbow room,” Curtis says. “UA has had to shoe-horn its way into growth without much of a long-term vision. Our new Campus Master Plan focuses on making the University look and feel like a unified campus while existing within a city environment. We want people to know immediately that they’re on campus... yet we don’t want them to feel isolated from the city of Akron.”

Curtis, along with

architectural planning firm, Sasaki Associates, and other University officials, visited several schools that had successfully managed to create such a metropolitan campus environment.

“We looked closely at Harvard, Boston College and M.I.T.—highly regarded metropolitan universities with beautiful, green, but fairly small [space-limited] campuses,” says Curtis. “And we’ve taken some elements of what they’ve done and incorporated it into UA’s Campus Master Plan.”

Sasaki Associates and the University’s facilities planning team, empowered by the Board of Trustees, started by identifying campus boundaries and planned for the planting of thousands

of trees on these edges. The trees and other plantings immediately and obviously became a unifying theme for campus transformation, and thousands more were planned to line walkways, form groves and “green up” areas around academic buildings. In total, there will be more than 50,000 trees and plants added to the landscape—4,000 large trees (10" to 15" high when planted), 7,000 flowering trees (6" to 10" high), 20,000 medium trees (perhaps of the redbud variety) and 20,000 edge plants and low shrubs.

Another element of unity for the transformed campus is the strategic location of new buildings and their relation to the

center of campus.

“Buchtel Hall is the heart and soul of the University landscape,” says Curtis, “and not only does the Campus Master Plan maintain that focus, but it also emphasizes it.”

The new Student Union, according to Curtis, will be constructed on almost exactly the existing site of Gardner Student Center. “However, it will be moved a little to the west, opening up a siteline—or window—to Buchtel Hall from the south.” Carroll Hall, on the east side of Buchtel Hall, will also eventually be demolished to allow a completely unobstructed north-south view from the University’s main administration building. “This also opens up a wonderful space near the Student Union and



Existing



Proposed College Green—looking south

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Buchtel Hall that can be used as a meeting area and amphitheatre," says Curtis.

The new Arts & Sciences Building, displacing the ground parking lots to the north of Bierce Library and situated on the southeast corner of Buchtel Ave. and College St., will form the front door to the University leading to that north-south corridor. Bolstering that sideline will be the new Student Affairs building, located on the northwest corner of the same intersection.

Just beyond the core of campus, the new Student Recreation and Wellness Center will be erected over a closed section of

Brown/Union Streets and Spicer Hall. A large glass atrium will point northwest toward Buchtel Hall, and will also lineup with the Goodyear Polymer Center. In subsequent years, a field house may be built directly to the south, further defining the area that, with Lee Jackson Field and JAR, will become a world-class, indoor-outdoor athletics complex

"The center of campus will not be accessible by car," says Curtis. "However, dropoff areas will be plentiful and the new, sizable parking decks to be built on the perimeter will provide five-minute access to any point on campus."

Curtis can't stress enough that the Campus Master Plan is a long-term guide for campus transformation. "The changes we've announced—the new buildings and addition of green space—are just the first step in a multi-phase process," he says.

"Several more sites have been identified for future academic and administrative buildings, research facilities, residence halls, parking decks and green areas."

In total, more than 29 projects have been suggested for further phases of advancement and growth of the University.

Closing Time

Unfortunately, transformation of UA's campus means that several time-worn facilities must be removed to make room for updated ones. Though they have served the University admirably over the years, the following buildings have been scheduled for demolition.

- Admissions Building
- Bel-Aire Building
- Central Services Building
- Express Building
- Gardner Student Center, Adjacent Boiler Plant and Computer Store
- North Hall
- Simmons Hall
- Spicer Hall
- 10 S. College St.
- 143 S. Union Building

"When it's all completed," says Curtis, "you won't believe your eyes. We're truly building a campus that's ready to provide a 21st century education."

Existing



Existing



Proposed Polymer Grove



View to Student Recreation Center