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Visualizing Humboldt State's Built Environment

Leo DiPierro

Humboldt State University, lj234@humboldt.edu

Rosalio Gonzalez

Humboldt State University, rg1685@humboldt.edu

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Visualizing Humboldt State's Built Environment

leo dipierro & roy gonzalez

One of the key attractions to Humboldt State is the character of the university's campus. Secluded, rural, and naturally beautiful are all terms used to describe the scenic hillside campus that seems to emerge from the boundaries of the Arcata Community Forest. From a geographic perspective, the characteristics and sense of place formed by a built environment are vitally important to place-based cultural identity. HSU is no exception, and students and faculty alike hold a bond with the campus' physical environment. Built environments are difficult to change, but it is imperative to understand what surrounds us to sustainably build in the future to improve the overall character of the campus.

HSU has expanded from the area occupied by Founders Hall. The campus descended down the hilltop over time with the construction of buildings and was altered further by the expansion of US Highway 101, which led to the current layout of LK Wood Boulevard as the campus' main access artery. As time has progressed, the campus has added more buildings, either by direct construction, acquisition, or additions. The bulk of HSU's campus environment was designed and laid out by a series of master plans extending back to 1949 and constructed throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Master plans are vital documents, and play a crucial role in shaping what a campus aspires to be. Newer buildings such as the Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) building and the sprawling Kinesiology and Athletics (KA) complex have also added twenty-first century amenities to the campus' repertoire.

Even these newer constructions tend to arrive in cycles, which are often tied to the state's economy. Master plans reflect the goals and ideas infusing the foundational planning process. According to Facilities Management Director Michael Fisher, construction on campus is a complex process and requires input from many sources. A number of factors, including accessibility, budgeting, and enrollment, determine how projects are structured within the university's Facilities Management division. The last cycle of construction at HSU occurred roughly from 2004 to 2011, bringing the addition of the BSS, KA, and the College Creek housing area as major projects.

Diverging visions for the campus have emerged in different eras. Dating back to the 1949 master plan, consequent iterations were revised and issued by the

university at different dates. Each plan from 1949 onward laid out capital projects, full-time enrollment goals, and housing units to be constructed. The current university master plan was put into place in 2004 and presents a significant vision for the campus and its student enrollment.

A number of contributing factors that have shaped the current scope of the university's physical plan. Deferred maintenance, budget cuts, and persistent financial issues have prevailed, and these all place significant strain on campus development. However, the university still has numerous major and minor projects within its pipeline. Planning is a long process. Fisher stated that currently more than 120 projects are in different stages of construction and design throughout HSU, including recent renovations to seismically secure the Theater Arts building and retrofit the Library. These projects and others like them have varying degrees of physical visibility, but are nonetheless vital to the continuing safe operation of campus activities.

Most recently, new university President Tom Jackson announced an \$8.6 million grant to reconstruct the dilapidated Trinity Annex on Fourteenth Street as the new home of the university's Children's Center. Additionally, Fisher also touched on the renovation of Jenkins Hall, the university's former industrial arts building. The renovated building will be an interdisciplinary maker-space incorporating digital labs and other state-of-the-art equipment facilities. What is remarkable is that the overhaul of Jenkins Hall will come with a decreased carbon footprint, as sustainability is a key focus of new campus projects.

In the bigger picture of university planning, the master plan itself is a subject of discussion. The current master plan, according to Fisher, is at the end of a typical life cycle; discussion is underway on the formation of an updated document for HSU. This is understandably a significant process, and Fisher indicated an important detail. "Master plans need to be an adaptable document," he said. "The future of the campus needs to be representative of the people we serve and of our locale."

The potential for a new university plan is no doubt significant. HSU is a uniquely situated campus, physically and culturally. We possess a strong and unique body of students, community, and sense of place that ties it all together.



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HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY
visualizing built environments