

Expand the Sense of Welcome, Discovery and Orientation
Throughout the Campus Landscape

Observations about the underlying structure and essential value of the campus setting inspired initial strategies for making improvements to the workings of the whole, as well as the experience and function of individual parts.

Observations

The campus is a diverse mosaic of landscape types

The landscape needs to function in its individual parts, but also as a whole

The Central Campus neighborhood is iconic and historic, but under intense development pressures

The Central Campus neighborhood is underperforming in several critical areas, including accessibility and connectivity

The East, South, and West Campus Neighborhoods each have substantial challenges and unrealized opportunities

The campus is a dynamic environment that responds to the evolving needs of the institution

Strategies



Preserve and celebrate the rich diversity of the landscape as the campus evolves and develops



Proposed changes need to be evaluated for their effect on the immediate mosaic pieces and on the functioning of campus-wide systems



Great care should be taken to protect landscape integrity when developing the last few sites available in Central Campus



Harness ongoing evolution as a means to preserve and strengthen the mosaic of Central Campus and its connections



Strengthening the landscape mosaic in the three peripheral neighborhoods, and improving connectivity throughout, will reduce the pressure on Central Campus



Change can be a positive force, but the timelessness and beauty of historic spaces needs to be protected as the campus evolves

RADIAL AXES AND VISTAS : THE BACKBONE OF PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE AND ORIENTATION



From the very earliest days of the University, with its founding on a hilltop with panoramic views of the surrounding landscape, the structure of the UW campus has been one of radiating systems from a strong center. This underlying structure is still very much in evidence today, and serves as an excellent orientation device in a highly complex place. Even newcomers to the campus quickly learn that if you can find your way back to one of the major axes, you can generally situate yourself on the central campus. This simple rule weakens the further you are from the center of campus, so one of the key goals of the CLF is to extend the structuring framework further from the central campus and into the peripheral neighborhoods.

A STRONG CENTER

There are many points of arrival on the UW campus, but as a first-time visitor, and to really get the feel of the place, there is no better place to start than Red Square. From this large central plaza, major axial landscape connections provide a very direct connection to most major areas within the Central Campus, so a general orientation to the core campus as a whole can be most easily developed. The relatively recent development of Red Square as part of the Central Parking Garage project means that both the contemporary and historic aspects of the UW campus are strongly represented in this central space. It has an open, democratic and powerful character and can clearly be read as the center, but remains an uncomfortable place to spend extended periods of time, and so can discourage gathering, which should be an important part of its function.

RADIATING AXES

It is one of the strong identity-giving features of the UW that each of its major axes is distinctive in multiple ways. The most figured of these spaces, capable of being appreciated from a single vantage point, is the Liberal Arts Quad. By comparison, Memorial Way is entirely defined by its major planted element - the double row of London Plane Trees. Rainier Vista has a strong architectural definition in its upper half, with a forested edge providing the framing element in its lower half. Campus Parkway/Olympic Vista is dominated by its active four lanes of roadway and it feels relatively unfigured, despite a strongly defined architectural edge and some mature trees in its center. Among these, Campus Parkway likely needs the most help in order to achieve its full potential as a major campus connection, but each of the axes has challenges that are addressed through CLF initiatives.

CAMPUS NEIGHBORHOODS



CHARACTER

There are four major UW neighborhoods with very distinct characters and clear boundaries. The neighborhoods are the result of topography first and foremost, but are also informed by architectural and landscape choices that reflect attitudes during different eras of campus growth. While most iconic landscape spaces are concentrated in the Central Campus, all four neighborhoods have outstanding moments and potential for even greater landscape value. The greatest value of the neighborhoods lies in their diverse characters, which give the UW campus a tremendous range of experience. This diversity should be understood and fostered.

FUNCTION

The strong reading of the campus neighborhoods, combined with the topography, supports both orientation and wayfinding on campus. The neighborhoods also serve different programmatic needs and have different capacities to absorb development and change. An understanding of each neighborhood's function can be used to guide major planning efforts and maximize the efficient use of the campus while retaining the quality of the landscape.

STRATEGY

The distinctive character of each neighborhood and the clear boundaries between them lead to an experiential and functional disconnectedness in places, particularly in relation to steep slopes and major roadways. While the individual nature of each neighborhood should be expressed, they need to feel and function as more of a collective and balanced whole than at present, so that currently underutilized parts of campus can be developed to take the pressure off over-programmed areas.

CENTRAL CAMPUS : THE ICONIC CORE



CHARACTER

The 210 acre Central Campus is quintessentially UW in feel, with many clearly figured landscape spaces, as well as a complementary network of smaller, more intricate, courtyards and gardens. Similarly, the architecture is a heterogeneous but complementary collection of buildings containing a diverse mixture of academic, research, administrative, residential, recreational, and social uses. The Central Campus is the most outward-looking of all neighborhoods as well, including the highest points and best views on the campus.

FUNCTION

The Central Campus is what most people are referring to when they talk about campus, with Red Square at its heart. This is the point of origin for many entering UW for the first time, and for those returning to enjoy an iconic UW moment. This is also the neighborhood with the highest percentage of social use, highest overall population, and the most diverse mix of graduate, undergraduate, faculty, and staff. In general the landscape of the Central Campus is under pressure from levels of use and desire for further development.

Central Campus

Landscape/ Development Proportions:

Total Area: 210 acres

45% Planted Area: 95 acres

37% Paved Area: 75 acres

18% Building Footprint Area: 40 acres

STRATEGY

Although the Central Campus is very close to development capacity, there are many opportunities to better integrate and connect its component parts. For instance, the Central Campus should be the easiest place to get to from the other neighborhoods, and the easiest place to navigate within. Greater connectivity between the center and adjacent neighborhoods is a major focus of several CLF case studies. The pronounced topography of the Central Campus presents a challenge for universal access and connectivity in the landscape; a concerted effort should be made to improve this condition, particularly in relation to Red Square and other key locations.

A DYNAMIC STRUCTURE

The overall character of the UW landscape is the product of the dynamic interaction between several large-scale landscape systems. Some of them are underlying physical realities, like the dramatic topography, drainage patterns, habitat range from ridge to waterfront, and views. Some of them are results of historic development patterns, the urban context, circulation, and infrastructural systems. The character is expressed in general terms at the neighborhood level, but the specific character of individual parts of the campus is expressed at a finer grain, as a diverse mosaic of landscape types. By understanding the interaction of the campus-wide systems with the individual mosaic pieces, a campus landscape framework can be developed, which has both a usefully high degree of specificity, and an understanding of the underlying mechanics of the campus landscape form.

THE LANDSCAPE MOSAIC

The UW campus landscape is a heterogeneous mosaic of landscape types. Each type, or piece of the mosaic, has a distinct character and function, ranging from the highly figured “Campus Green” spaces of Denny Yard and Rainier Vista to the “interstitial or buffer spaces” that are often forgotten, but are found in key locations throughout the campus. By identifying and describing each element of the mosaic, the Campus Landscape Framework (CLF) shows how all parts of the landscape work together to create a functioning whole. The reading of the campus as a mosaic celebrates the richness and diversity of landscape types, and resists the temptation to find campus-wide solutions to issues that demand more nuance. Each mosaic element should be addressed on its own terms, taking into account adjacent relationships, but making sure they are treated as having their own integrity. They should not be sub-divided into ever smaller pieces, as often happens when parts of a landscape are considered as components of a building development or other capital project.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE AND PRESERVATION

The CLF identifies the value in the function and character of the mosaic pieces, highlighting pieces that have been degraded, are not functioning at their potential, or have never been developed in a positive way. Given the heterogenous nature of the campus, and the overall high quality of much of the landscape, it seems unlikely that deep structural changes would be beneficial, or even possible. However, there are key areas where strategic change on a relatively modest scale could trigger positive developments across a number of landscape components (identity, wayfinding, ecology, access, entry, sense of history and place, etc.). As the campus evolves, it is important to defend the diversity of landscape experience and communicate the contributions of each type of landscape. For instance, the woodland has been a defining feature of the campus since its inception, but its role in the landscape mosaic is threatened as these areas become thin margins rather than robust frames.

PLAZA

CHARACTER

Plazas are large-scale figured spaces, usually defined by surrounding buildings. Typically, plazas are mostly paved, and allow free circulation across them rather than through defined pathways. Most of the uses that take place in a plaza do not preclude trees, but they are generally open to the sky, with relatively little shade. Ideally, a plaza will have enough complexity of experience to feel welcoming and engaging even when just a few people are there, and will be designed to be a comfortable place to be at different times of the year.

Example includes: Red Square; Drumheller Fountain; Hec Ed Plaza

FUNCTION

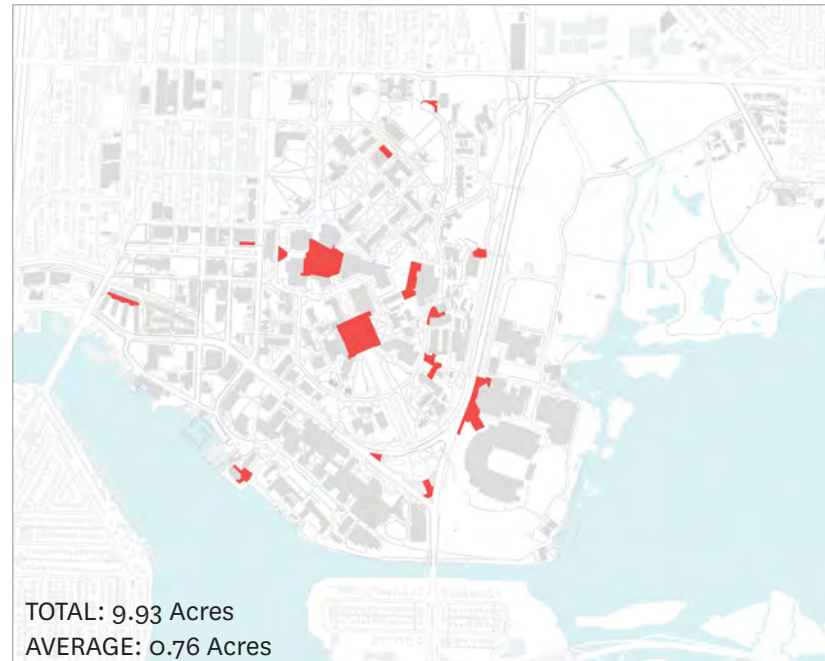
Plazas can host civic gatherings, festivals, and fairs, and they can be important spaces for temporary installations or uses, such as the food trucks in Red Square. Plazas can also provide a sense of openness and breadth as a relief from architectural density, such as the Frosh Pond Plaza. They are relatively robust as a landscape type and can withstand high levels of use year-round.

STRATEGY

While there is no need to create more big plazas on the order of Red Square, the creation of smaller plazas, which provide seating and shade and places to gather, will continue to be important as the campus expands. For instance, plazas will be one potential means of creating a sense of welcome and spatial generosity in West Campus without impinging on the vibrant urban character that is being developed in that neighborhood.



Red Square



THRESHOLD

CHARACTER

Moving past the outer boundaries of the UW campus, the campus is experienced both sequentially and continuously, as a series of spaces and as a route through these spaces. Within this sense of continuity, thresholds are landscapes whose primary purpose is to provide a transition into or between important moments on the campus and as such have a significant role to play in the experience of those more iconic spaces.

Examples include: Multiple Red Square Thresholds; Entrance to Fine Arts Quad

FUNCTION

Thresholds provide breathing room between the experience of different moments on the campus. In some cases, the need for thresholds is determined by the size of the spaces and the size of the architecture. Thresholds can feel like small courtyards or plazas in their own right, but their primary role is to create a sense of anticipation and a clear means of moving from one space to the next.

STRATEGY

Thresholds are sometimes an indication of the importance of the connection being made. Places on campus where it might be appropriate to enhance this sense of a guided transition from one place to another include many of the entries along 15th Ave NE, as well as between Health Sciences and the campus waterfront. Many thresholds on campus are not universally accessible, so a focus on fixing these impediments to connection should be a priority of the CLF.



George Washington Statue Plaza



THE CAMPUS EXPERIENCED IN MOTION

Although the signature moments on the UW campus are truly iconic, and can be captured through the lens of a camera or by a moment's quiet contemplation, the campus landscape is most commonly experienced in motion: a walk between classes, arriving or leaving for the day's work, an informal game with friends. Most members of the university community are not tied to a single location on campus throughout any given day, so the exquisite setting must therefore be supported by an engaging, welcoming, and comfortable experience of travelling between parts. This is not merely a question of wayfinding and orientation, although this is a key component, but it goes to the heart of the role of the campus landscape as a place for mental refreshment between tasks, a place for social interaction, and a place of inspiration.

The management of convenient navigability is not simple, and should support the pleasure of moving through the campus – a visit to the UW can start in the car, on a bus, on a bike, or on foot, and each person can have multiple origins and destinations throughout the day, but vigilance is required to ensure the landscape does not become overwhelmed with wayfinding information. Connections are used for different purposes – some users might be in a hurry to get where they are going, and seek a direct path, whereas other might be looking to engage the campus and the community by immersing themselves in an outdoor environment, or a social space. All of these aspects of moving through the campus should be supported. The network of paths and visual relationships on the UW campus should be considered as a complete system, and a landscape in its own right, with functional and aesthetic characteristics complementing each other. It should be user-friendly and inspiring in the broadest possible sense, creating an environment that adds value to the different types of trips that different users make at different times in the day or in different seasons of the year.

Observations

The campus is organized around radiating axes that emanate from a strong center and weaken as they reach outward

Accessibility networks are available but are often not direct

Different people use pathways for different modal purposes, at different times

The individuals who know the campus best are those who live, work, and study here

The campus is a vast and complex environment that needs to provide clarity for visitors as well as interest for daily users

Strategies



Integrate experience of center and periphery by strengthening connections throughout the campus



Obstacles to access should be overcome wherever possible, but particularly within the most publicly accessed areas, such as the central iconic spaces of the campus



Embrace the diversity of the pedestrian network to ensure that purposeful movement is accommodated alongside experiential richness

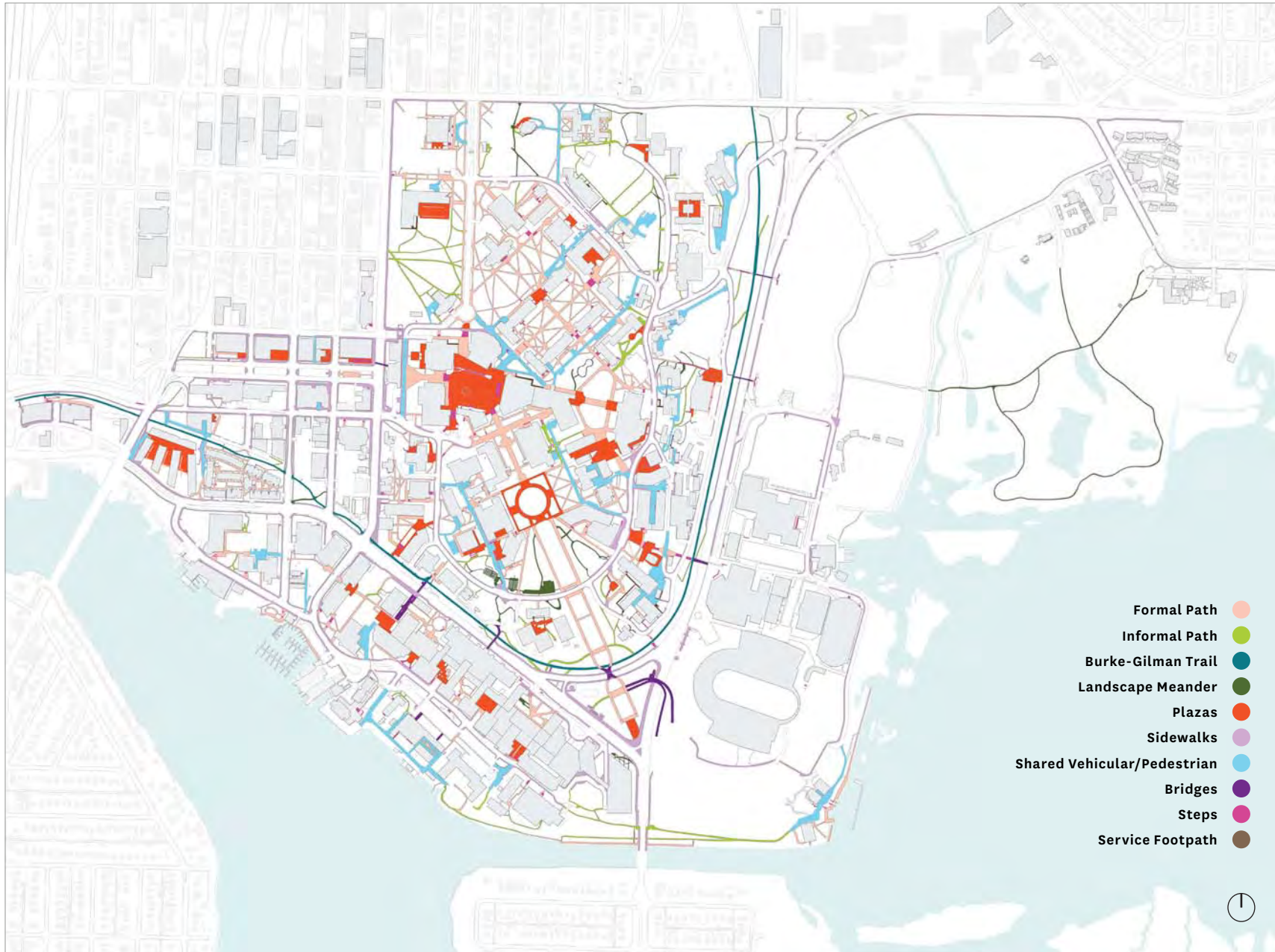


Solicit ongoing feedback about what is or is not working on the campus and value the needs of different user groups



Supplement structure of landmarks, sight lines, and axes with unobtrusive wayfinding and orientation information

PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION - DIVERSITY IN TYPE AND EXPERIENCE



PATHWAY TYPES

Just as there are diverse places within the UW landscape, there are diverse ways to navigate the campus. In the full range of variables that defines the difference between formal paths and services footpaths, there are many different factors that influence the appropriate type, size, layout, and materials for different campus connections. In some instances, such as the Arts Quad and Red Square, the paving materials form strong associations with the surrounding architecture and a particular historic moment. In other locations, such as Memorial Way or the Burke Gilman Trail, the spatial enclosure of adjacent planting determines the character of a pathway while the material of the paving seems of secondary importance.

FUNCTION

Given the multi-directional nature of circulation on campus, all pathways at the University of Washington get some pedestrian traffic, even in cases where the primary use for the space is envisioned to be service, or for a different mode of travel. For instance, pedestrians make use of the Burke Gilman Trail as well as the service access routes along Skagit Lane. In some cases, this may be due to the fact that a given route is the shortest distance between two points. In other cases it might be a question of preferring the most experientially satisfying route between two points.

STRATEGY

The diverse functions and experiences of the campus network of pedestrian circulation require a flexible approach that does not try to homogenize the experience or material treatment. Identifying and describing the different components of the pedestrian network will allow future design teams to locate their work within the larger whole. Similar to the way campus architecture may involve many different materials but should still aim to preserve a sense of belonging to the whole, the different moments within the pedestrian circulation network can be designed to effectively meet a particular need within the context of the campus landscape as a whole.

PLAZAS

CHARACTER

The larger plazas are generally found at major confluence points on campus and are places where pathways open out into broad areas of paved circulation space. Although they exist within a defined spatial envelope, most often with buildings around their perimeter, movement within the space is non-hierarchical, guided only by the number of thresholds that enter into the space. Smaller plazas are more tightly associated with individual buildings.

FUNCTION

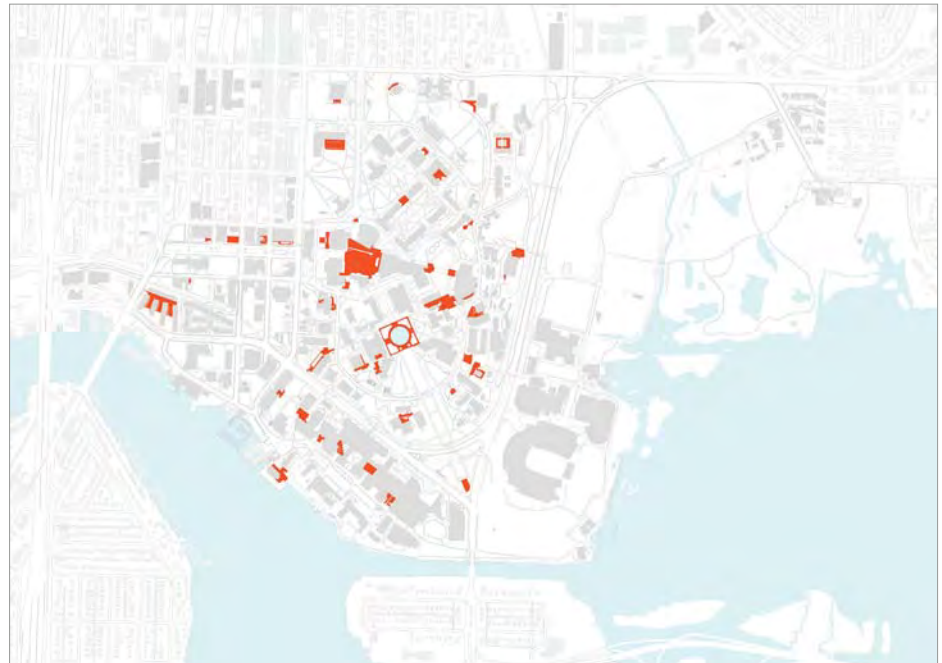
Plazas avoid the need to inscribe particular routes into a landscape, which makes them particularly valuable in highly active spaces that are used for passage through as well as being destinations in their own right. Plazas are highly durable and can accommodate events and a high level of active programming.

STRATEGY

Although Plazas are robust landscapes with a high degree of paving, they should be designed to provide comfort and experiential complexity for those who wish to sit and stay, as well as provide good accessible routes to support campus circulation. Red Square is a good example of a Plaza that could be a more comfortable and inviting place to stay rather than just pass through. Plazas can play an increasingly important role in the landscape mosaic as West Campus becomes denser. In this part of campus, Plazas can welcome both campus and neighborhood users.



Red Square



STEPS

CHARACTER

In some places on the UW campus, steps are an exciting foreground to campus buildings and create broad seating areas for socializing and other types of large-scale gatherings. In other places, such as the thresholds into Red Square, steps are an impediment to landscape accessibility. Due to the pronounced topography, steps are found throughout the campus.

FUNCTION

Prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, stairs were frequently used to make landscape connections on campus. Particularly in the Central Campus, stairs are used to differentiate adjacent spaces, providing a change of pace and height at thresholds to many of the figured landscape spaces. Because stairs can not function as accessible routes, they now have to be modified or bypassed to serve that purpose.

STRATEGY

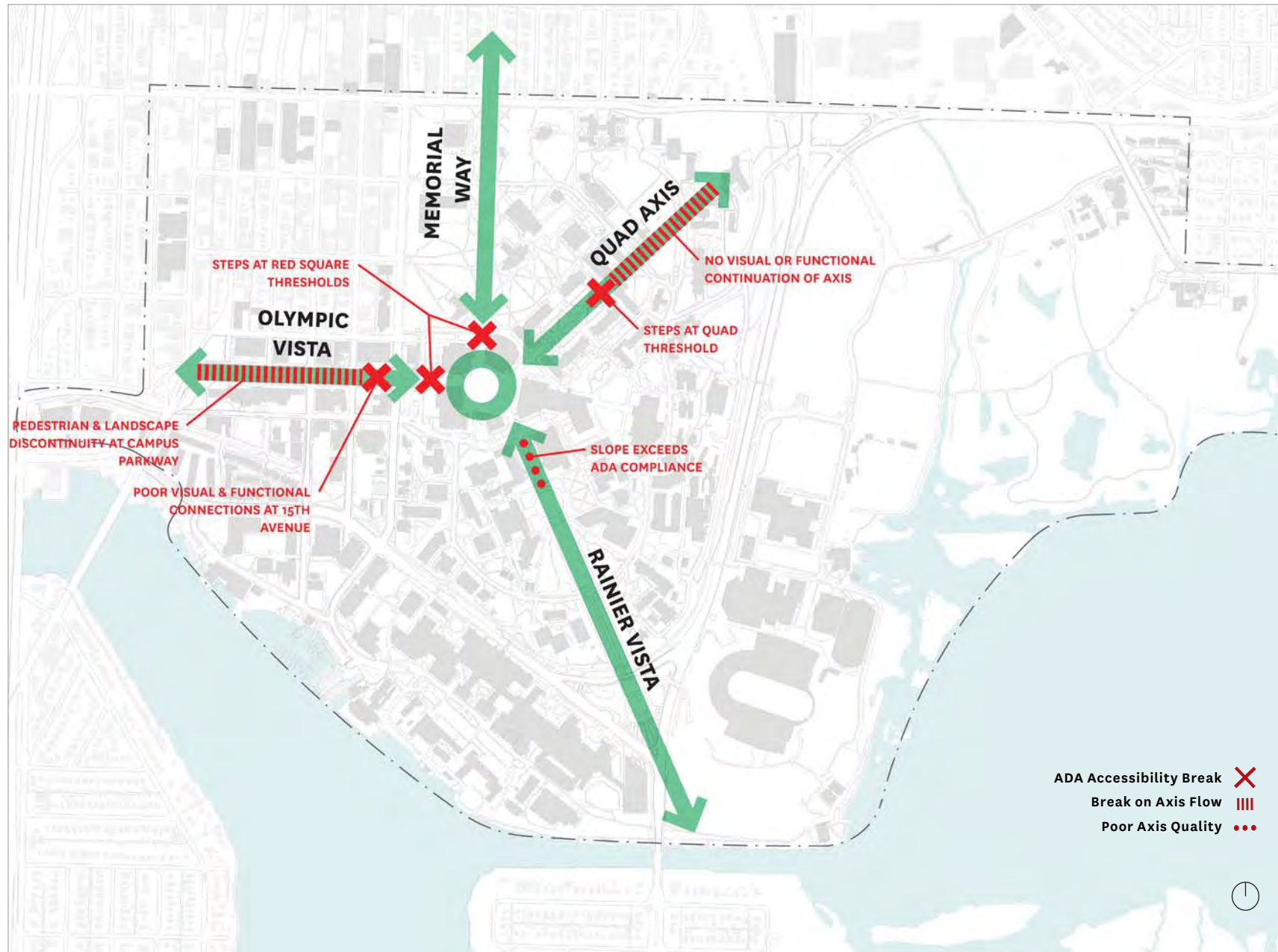
While recognizing the landscape value of stairs in many circumstances, the emphasis should be on expanding the degree to which accessible routes follow major pedestrian movement through the campus, rather than being relegated to a second tier of connections. Where stairs are an impediment to making generous, clear connections, efforts should be made to increase the range and quality of accessible options.



Red Square Threshold



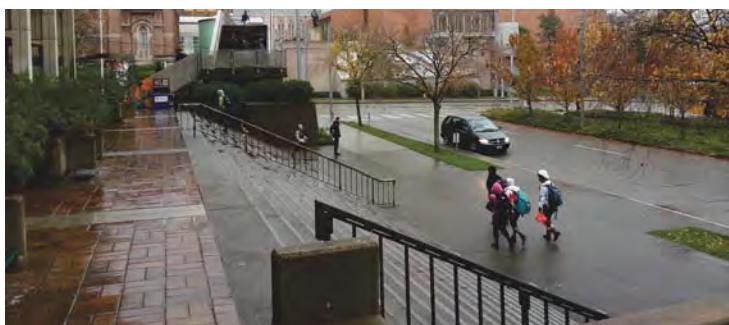
RADIAL AXES AND VISTAS : A CLEAR STRUCTURE WITH COMPROMISED CONNECTIONS





STEEP SLOPES

The steep slopes that characterize the UW campus create many challenging connections for people with compromised mobility. In some cases, this includes pathways that are too steep to navigate safely and comfortably. In some cases, for instance the entry off 15th Street in front of the Henry Gallery, architectural density matched with slope extremity preclude a simple accessibility solution for the time being, so elevators have been installed to bridge the gap. Not every pathway can accommodate accessible slopes, but every attempt should be made, such as on the Rainier Vista, where there is sufficient landscape depth to address the issue through a subtle regrading.



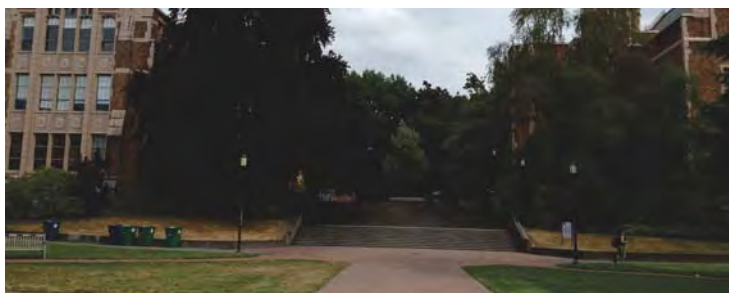
STEPS TO BUILDING ENTRANCES

Prior to the passage of the Americans With Disabilities act of 1990, stairs were an expedient and code-compliant means of bridging elevational drops within a relatively small foot print. Since the majority of campus buildings were built before the ADA became federal law, there are many buildings whose primary entrances are up a flight of steps. While many of these conditions have been retrofitted for wheelchair access, there are still many entrances to major buildings that are not accessible.



STEPS AT KEY CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

Accessibility is something that also needs to be addressed in major landscape connections, not just conditions immediately adjacent to buildings. For instance, Odegaard Library has an accessible connection to Red Square, but Red Square itself is accessed by steps at many key points, including the connection to Memorial Way to the north.



INCOMPLETE AXIS CONTINUITY

Conditions that preclude a mobility challenged person's ability to travel major campus pedestrian routes can dramatically affect their ability to navigate campus. With every project it undertakes, the UW should be seeking ways to implement an appropriate hierarchy of accessible circulation on campus, starting with the major axes first. In some cases, for instance the stairs at the end of the quad, alternatives to a staired route should be designed as major landscape connections.

IMPROVE CORE TO PERIPHERY CONNECTIONS



A COMPLEMENT TO THE CAMPUS LANDSCAPE FRAMEWORK

The UW has recently completed a Campus Wayfinding and Signage Strategy to complement the CLF, and to ensure that all campus users' experiences are supported with appropriate and well-located navigation information, whether they are first-time or long-time users, as pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and drivers, who may be students, faculty, staff, visitors, neighbors and/or making deliveries.

The goal of the Strategy is to:

- Support campus user experience
- Be relevant to all types of visitors
- Be Respectfully designed and located
- Link all transportation modes
- Enable coordinated implementation

The study explored the potential for the wayfinding strategy to contribute to the objectives of the University in the following areas:

- **Transportation:** The planned shift from driving and transit to active transportation suggests wayfinding has an important role as a means to inform, encourage and enable different travel choices.
- **Campus identity:** The emergence of the One University platform to unify external communication provides an opportunity to ensure wayfinding helps confirm location and the University's diverse range of visitors.
- **The Campus Landscape Framework:** The wayfinding strategy will support the tools that will provide ongoing planning, design and stewardship of the setting of the campus site and its buildings.

The objectives and principles for wayfinding at the University of Washington place considerable reliance on consistency and continuity to assist with user navigation and to help unify the identity of the Seattle campus. The recognition and reliable placement of information is part of the consistency users expect and is important to the success of the

system. However, there are many other objectives to consider, including the conservation of heritage and sensitive visual settings. The Campus Landscape Framework provides an overarching direction for landscape stewardship that the Wayfinding project must respect as well as assist.

The sign placement strategy can be described as having two levels of development: information need and environmental context. The information needs are evaluated by preparing hierarchies of destinations and routes. These hierarchies provide a simplification of reality for the efficient and reliable placement of information.

The destination hierarchy attempts to define areas, or "containers," as well as specific buildings to enable addressing methods to be used in directions. The route hierarchy aims to represent both existing desire lines and potential priority routes that will be important to movement in the area. This process produces logical intersections where decisions will be made that could be informed by wayfinding signage.

UW Wayfinding Principles:

1. Name the places
2. Use landmarks
3. Create reliable routes
4. Establish orientation points
5. Make stepping stones
6. Use progressive disclosure
7. Describe visually
8. Support sightlines
9. Create a welcome

The Campus Wayfinding and Signage Strategy can be found on the Office of the University Architect website.