You know the Joni Mitchell song about paving paradise and the parking lot? Well, at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, that tune has been rewritten and what was once a parking lot is now a multi-faceted green space in the center of campus, a veritable paradise of gathering spaces for the students, faculty, visitors, and administration.

Bloomsburg University is a public university in Bloomsburg (pop. 67,269), that's in east central Pennsylvania, a little north of the Susquehanna River. The before image (inset, left) shows the uninspiring parking lot at the entry to Andruss Library. The new design shows Andruss Library from the Central Plaza. The pavers ('Appian' from Hanover) are complemented with cast stone coping for the raised planters, seat walls, and fountain pool. The seat walls and cast stone caps (Donald E. Kocher, Inc., supplied by Keystone Precast) are also replicated at the Andruss Library courtyard and at the stage area of the Student Center.

Photography by Nathan Cox Photography
The Inspiration ~ How It All Began

The school’s Academic Quad site was previously a central parking area on campus, along with a smaller adjacent lawn panel. In the words of a university publication, “going…going…gone is Bloomsburg University’s ugliest and most annoying parking lot.” The site stretches from the campus library to the east side of the Student Services Building and includes a walkway to the north and south of Warren Center Student Services Building. Warren Center, Sutliff, Centennial, McCormick, Waller Halls and the Andruss Library bound it.

The university was looking for a firm to develop an overall design for the space that would address hardscape, lighting, and landscape planting improvements. In addition, they wanted to create spaces for gathering and social interaction, while incorporating new entrances to adjacent buildings and developing a strong pedestrian connection to further tie the campus together.

Tuning Up ~ Gathering Input for the Design

The Bloomsburg University administration came to the table with some clear and specific goals for the project. Overall, the space was envisioned as the crowning jewel that would cap off several recent construction projects in the immediate area. This new space, which would be aptly named the Academic Quad, is flanked by academic buildings, many newly constructed or recently renovated.

Amidst all this architecture, the Academic Quad was to function as a key gathering and unifying space in this part of campus. As such, green space was desired. The amount of impervious coverage within the project area has been decreased by approximately three quarters of an acre. This was important, as the 5.5 acre Academic Quad really functions as the only large campus green space for the student body, outside of the athletic fields located on the north edge of campus.

In addition to a predominantly green space, the administration also desired an open space that would not obstruct views to the Andruss Library. Since the views to the library were of paramount concern,
The open space was also pictured as the perfect place to host commencement exercises if a variety of temporary seating could be incorporated into the space to accommodate approximately 6,000 people (graduates and guests).

**ADA-Accessibility**

Finally, the open area was envisioned as an all-inclusive gathering space for anyone on the campus. Therefore, ADA compliance was an important consideration during the design work. ADA-compliant building access became part of the design. From these new building access points, the design called for a smooth transition to the pedestrian walkways to the north, south, east, and west.

Of special concern was the Waller Building, which had no access on the quad-side of the building. Creating a new entry here to meet up with the existing building entry gave Waller Hall direct access to and from the Quad.

**The Composition ~ Key Design Details**

After synthesizing all the input from the university, the design team got to work on design options to accommodate the various features desired for the space. The final design addressed all the items on the university's list and even added some key design details to make this a unique yet immediately comfortable space.

**The Stage ~ Located at the entrance to the Student Services Center, this raised area appears to be a normal hardscape entry plaza to any campus building. However, careful planning allowed the space to double as a stage for musical performances and concerts, and be the main stage for commencement exercises.**

**Campus Green ~ This natural grass area allows for passive recreation year-round, but it was also designed to host commencement exercises. Therefore, the space was sized to accommodate removable seating for commencements. This former flat site was regraded to create a gently sloping lawn. This change in grade works with the temporary seating to create an outdoor auditorium where everyone has a view of the stage. Finally, at the eastern-most part of the green, temporary bleachers can also be installed for additional seating, flanking the Central Plaza.**

**Central Plaza ~ Located close to the entry space for Centennial Hall and in the center of the Academic Quad, the Central Plaza is a more structured gathering space that contains the campus seal, a historic fountain, seat walls, site furnishings, raised planting areas and flowering trees. It functions as a pedestrian intersection, handling large numbers of students flowing in multiple directions at any one time, but also is a focal point and gathering space.**

**The University Seal ~ A distinctive hardscape element is the Bloomsburg University seal: a 10’ diameter Mesabi black granite slab, custom cut, 4” thick with a thermal finish and sandblast incised 1/8” lettering. The addition of the seal creates an instant treasured photo spot and landmark on campus.**

**Revamping the Historic Fountain ~ An historic cast iron fountain is also incorporated into the Central Plaza area of the Academic Quad. The fountain was first donated to the university by the class of 1940. It was located elsewhere on campus and then was put on display inside one of the campus buildings. The administration wanted to reintroduce the fountain into the campus landscape and a new site within the Academic Quad was quickly selected. However, the fountain had to be retrofitted with new fountain plumbing. Then, to add prominence to the fountain, a fountain ring was designed. The old fountain sits completely inside the new fountain ring. The fountain spray patterns from each fountain work together to create an interesting give-and-take of water.**

**Sculpture Garden ~ Adjacent to the Central Plaza, the Sculpture Garden offers a quiet seating and study area. The garden is now home to many sculptures previously located elsewhere in the space at random locations. The Sculpture Garden boasts the most intensive planting in the Academic Quad. It provides seasonal color, open lawn area, meandering paths, accent lighting. This is a more relaxed and organic space when compared to the Campus Green and Central Plaza.**
The elevated entry to the Student Services Center doubles as a stage for commencement and various performances. Here, bluestone pavers were installed on a mortar setting bed over a concrete base. This selection matched the existing pavement at the Student Services Building for size, color, jointing and pattern. A fescue mix sod (Hoopes Turf Farm) was specified for the Bloomsburg Green.

Our designers maintained close contact with the general contractor, Don E. Bower, Inc., throughout construction. Having a general contractor who took pride in the project and was willing to work to make the design intent a reality went a long way toward making the Academic Quad the inviting and successful space it is today.

Hitting a High Note – The Academic Opus

The Academic Quad is now the unifying element it was intended to be. Anyone on campus is immediately drawn to the space. Students have readily planned events in the area, including Zumba gatherings—dance-fitness done to Latin music developed by Alberto “Beto” Perez—and even campus-wide snowball fights. Formal events have also been successful in the space, beginning in May of 2008 when nearly 1,100 Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania seniors received their bachelor’s degrees during the first commencement ceremonies on the Academic Quad. Each element of the overall Quad works in concert with the others, creating a lively and welcoming core for the Bloomsburg University campus.

About the Firm

Derck & Edson Associates, established in 1940, offers planning and design services to shape the natural and built environment in innovative and functional ways. The firm includes landscape architects, civil engineers and land planners with a full range of design and technical capabilities. The firm’s services include land planning, site design, civil engineering and construction administration. The firm specializes in higher education campus work, downtown centers, corporate facilities, senior-living communities and athletic venues throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

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