What is landscape architecture?

Most everyone is familiar with the terms landscape and architecture, but what does it mean when these two words are put together? According to the American Society of Landscape Architects, landscape architecture is “the science and art of design, planning, management and stewardship of the land.”

When people think about landscape, they likely envision lush lawns with colorful flowerbeds – and they would be right. But landscape architecture is more than the plant or natural materials – it also includes built elements, cultural and scientific knowledge and concern for resource conservation that results in the environment serving both a useful and enjoyable purpose. Landscape architecture maximizes use of the land, adds value to a project and minimizes costs, all with minimum disruption to nature.

The term landscape architecture dates back to 1828 when it was used in a book written by a Scottish man named Gilbert Laing Meason. However, Frederick Law Olmsted was the first person to use landscape architect as a professional title in the United States when he designed New York City’s Central Park in the late 1850s. Olmsted is considered the father of American landscape architecture.

Why is landscape architecture important? It’s a rewarding and important green career in high demand, especially as development continues to impact the natural environment. Landscape architects not only add beauty to the land, but they often solve complex environmental issues. In addition, they create a quality environment for people’s health and well-being.

Take a look around on your travels and you’ll see the positive impact this profession has on cities around the world. As already mentioned, Central Park is easily recognizable by visitors to the Big Apple. Millennium Park in Chicago, Chinatown Park and Harvard Square, both in Boston, and the Myriad Gardens in Oklahoma City are a few more examples of beautiful work done by landscape architects. Hotels and resorts, senior living facilities, sports stadiums, neighborhood developments and cemeteries also use landscape architects in planning new projects.

Oklahoma State University offers a nationally credited program in landscape architecture. More information about this program is available online.

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