



Sustainable Site

UTEP's Campus Transformation Earns Prestigious Certification

The University of Texas at El Paso's Campus Transformation project has earned several international awards since it was officially unveiled in April 2015 to include the world's first SITES Certification Award in the Silver category for achievement in landscape sustainability.

The project transformed much of the campus into a pedestrian-friendly environment with shade structures and about 700 native and drought-resistant trees, bushes and plants.

The project's crown jewel is Centennial Plaza, an 11-acre multiuse, ecologically friendly oasis that students, faculty, staff and visitors use to relax, study and collaborate.

The design involves wide, multi-textured walking paths, decorative lighting, water features, concrete benches and a 130-seat amphitheater. It also incorporates underground infrastructure

upgrades and rock-strewn arroyos and acequias to enhance stormwater drainage.

Mahesh Ramanujam, president of Green Business Certification Inc., the group behind the SITES award, said the project showed tremendous leadership in landscape design.

"We know that a sustainable built environment extends beyond the four walls of a building, and through the use of SITES, projects like this are creating ecologically resilient communities, reducing water demand, improving air quality and human health by connecting people to nature," Ramanujam said. "UTEP and the entire project team who worked on this certification are true leaders in campus transformation and sustainable landscape design."

The plaza has been used for numerous official University activities, from welcoming events to campus health fairs and Movies on the Lawn. While individuals use it as a place to eat, stroll

or capture Pokémon, larger groups use it for weekly after-hours yoga classes. Staff have used it for team-building exercises and faculty have used it as an outdoor classroom to test equipment and prepare for off-campus research trips.

Among the projects' other honors were the People's Choice Award in Outstanding Green Infrastructure and Low Impact Development from the Environmental Protection Agency, Excellence in Landscape Architecture from the international Society for College and University Planning, and the 2015 Gold Leaf Award from the Texas Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture.

Greg McNicol, associate vice president for business affairs – facilities management, said the University was honored to have been recognized for this successful once-in-a-lifetime project.

"As is, it has had a positive impact on the University and the community," McNicol said. - **Daniel Perez**