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Professor Michael Timmons Interview Transcription

Michael Timmons
Utah State University

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Professor Michael Timmons Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Michael Timmons
Date of interview: August 15, 2013
Place of interview: Distance Education Building, room 101, Utah State University Campus

Interviewer: Aaron Smith
Recorder: Aaron Smith
Recording Equipment: Tascam DR-05

Subject of interview: Michael Timmons' personal and professional history; The Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning, Utah State University; the profession of landscape architecture

Transcriber: Aaron Smith
Date of transcription: August 27, 2013

Brief Description of Contents: This interview was conducted as research for part of *The History of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning*, Master's Thesis by Aaron Smith. It contains Michael Timmons, professor in the Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning Department(LAEP) at Utah State University, discussing his education, professional practice, and experience as an educator at LAEP.

References: AS = Aaron Smith (Interviewer)
MT = Michael Timmons (Interviewee)

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

AS: For the record, what is your name and who are you?

MT: My name is Michael Timmons., I'm a landscape architecture professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning. I have been with the Department for about thirty five years.

AS: Where were you born? Where did you live growing up?

MT: I was born in Moscow, Idaho, and moved away from there at the ripe young age of one, and moved to Michigan, where I grew up for most of my life in East Lansing, Michigan. My father was on the faculty at Michigan State and sort of led me in that direction when I finished up all of my primary and secondary schooling. I just walked across the street to

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Michigan State. After graduating from college, I moved to the east coast and then continued eastward to England, and lived elsewhere in the world.

AS: How did you become interested in landscape architecture?

MT: I think it was while I was growing up. My family travelled frequently and my father always had these great summer trips planned and often times winter outing over Christmas break, and we would travel and visit the National Parks, and did a lot of camping in Michigan, and some of the State Parks. I really developed an incredible appreciation for nature, both in a fairly raw sense as well as in a designed sense. I loved the National Park and State Parks. There was something about the rustic style of design, rustic period, the parkitecture that was used in those parks. I think it all derived from the landscape architecture of the 1930's during the real key early years in the National Park Service when a lot of the early master planning and camp ground designs and other facilities were being created, and I think that influenced me quite heavily.

So that was the first thing, travel and seeing all these great places. The second thing was growing up on the edge of suburbia. The place where we lived was right on the edge of where development was and surrounding us across the street was an empty field, a block away was a forest, and I was never inside. I used to go with my buddies off to the woods and chop down trees, pretend we were Daniel Boone building forts, and we would build tree houses and dig underground shelter. It was constantly doing things creatively in an outdoor environment, and it was the feeling like I had the run of the country side, and I think all of that really influenced me to eventually discover landscape architecture.

In terms of how I really got into the field of landscape architecture academically, that's a different story. I made my way, as I mentioned, to Michigan State University, and spent my first year as an undeclared student. I really had no clue what I wanted to do, like so many other students we work with. It was frustrating, I was taking courses that I felt like I should be taking in college, like calculus and organic chemistry, and all of these things that were not very satisfying and I was not doing terribly well in them. So I remember going in spring of that year the counseling center on campus and they gave me an aptitude test. I am not quite sure what it was called, the Ohio Aptitude Test or something

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like that, where you answer a whole bunch of questions. Would you rather take apart an automobile engine or build something out of tinker toys? That was before Lego's. They compile all of these answers and you sit there for an hour taking this test, and at the end of the test I met with a councilor and they said "well, we have you in the 95th percentile of aptitude for being a performing musician or a landscape architect." I said "well, I've played trumpet for a number of years, but I am terrified when I get up on stage and play trumpet, I am sure that's not my career, but what is this landscape architecture thing you are telling me about?" I had never heard of the profession, so they told me a little bit about, they didn't know much themselves, but they said "We have a great department here at Michigan State. Why don't you go on over and meet with somebody." So I did, and as soon as I walked in that building and started down the hallways, the hallways were festooned with drawings that students had produced and they were all hanging up and everything clicked. I said, "my gosh, this is it!" I mean its combining all my experiences from national parks and state parks and these people are creating those kind of environments and it combined my love of the outdoors with my love of art and creativity, and it was a perfect marriage. That's how I got into landscape architecture.

AS: How would you describe the Department at Michigan State During that time?

MT: It was a very strong department. It was one of the earlier programs of landscape architecture in the country. It was very much focused toward design in both the private and public sectors. Its emphasis was good design. A lot of emphasis on planting and natural systems. It was a large program. I think there were probably fifty students in my graduating class, so it was extremely large. This was right at the period of time, so we are talking late 60's and I graduated from Michigan State in 1970, this was a really important time in the world when Rachael Carlson had written Silent Spring and in 1970 Ian McHarg was going all his work with environmental planning and looking at large scale impacts of human on the earth. His book and all of this was feeding us as students at Michigan State. We were really swept away with the environmental movement that was beginning to happen and concern over pollution and all kinds of other things. I think all of that really fed into the program at that time and reinforced the fundamentals that they were teaching.

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AS: After graduating, did you always intend to go to graduate school? How did you transition after graduation?

MT: I took a job. My first job I was actually working part time as a student with the Department of Natural Resources in Michigan. That was wonderful. I got to work with architects conceiving conceptual plans for visitor centers that related to the landscape and express the building program. As soon as I graduated I took a job in Massachusetts on Cape Cod. I talked to my faculty members and tried to get some names of firms. I wanted to move, I wanted to experience the world, so I sent letters off all over the place and had an offer from Fort Lauderdale and this one from Cape Cod and just decided that Cape Cod would be a greater environment. So I moved there, worked for about a year, and was informed by Michigan State that I had been awarded a scholarship, if I wanted to take advantage of it, to go to grad school at Harvard. Interestingly, I had not thought about grad school, it hadn't ever come on the horizon, wasn't on the radar screen until I got this notice and I was living only an hour and a half drive from Boston, and had become familiar with Harvard campus and knew several alumni through the office I was working in. So things sort of happened that way. That was the only place I applied, so it was kind of an unplanned, serendipitous experience.

AS: Describe the atmosphere at Harvard. What is going on at Harvard in the early 70's?

MT: It was a very interesting time. Harvard has always been kind of at the cutting edge of education, and aren't afraid to change courses abruptly. Right at that particular moment, right in the early 1970s, I mentioned Ian McHarg's work, McHarg had become department head at the University of Penn and one of his faculty members, Dick Toth, left to join the faculty at Harvard and took a lot of McHarg's ideas, large scale planning ideas, and began networking with folks in the lab for computer graphics at Harvard. They were developing ways of looking at the natural landscape and broad scale context, and really exploring environmental planning. It was something I don't think I'd anticipated when I initially went to Harvard. I thought well, it will be more design, in depth design studios, and it wasn't at all, because Harvard was leading the way in terms of large scale environmental planning. Carl Steinitz was on the faculty and a number of other folks that went on to be real leaders in this area.

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Now things were very primitive in terms of computer application. At that point we had to hand code maps and hand punch cards and we would then take the stack of cards to the main frame computer at Harvard, and you would load all these cards in and you would pray that you didn't slip on a patch of ice and all the cards go flying all over the place and get out of order. But it would take sometimes, twenty four hours for the computer, which was the size of an entire building, to generate a map, and they were pretty crude looking computer maps. That's pretty much what was happening at Harvard at that time, and it was a great opportunity to be there at that critical juncture in the development of computer technology.

AS: After graduating from Harvard, what were your career goals at the time? Where did you work?

MT: I had begun working while I was a student at Harvard at the Sasaki office, Sasaki Dawson and DeMay was what it was called at the time, in Watertown, Massachusetts. So upon graduation I just went on full time with Sasaki, and, it's a funny kind of logic for a career path, but my fiancé at the time had received a Fulbright Scholarship to study music in Salzburg, Austria, and I decided I don't want to be stuck in Boston while she is over in Europe. So I thought, why don't I go to Europe and try to find a job. I boldly sent out a bunch of letter to firms in England and elsewhere on the continent, and had no replies, which is par for the course. So I decided I was going to head over anyway, pack my bags and pack my portfolio, run over to England and start knocking on doors. Lo and behold, within the first week there I had landed a job with Brian Clousten and Partners, in London. It was great because it had got me to Europe and closer to my fiancé, but it also gave me wonderful exposure to things that were happening elsewhere in the world in the area of landscape architecture. In terms of planning my future career, I'd say it was almost more of an accidental sort of thing. I kept stumbling from one thing to another, and they were actually all really good things, but it wasn't undertaken with any kind of conscience forethought to lead me in those directions.

AS: How did you get involved in education while in London?

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MT: I had always had something of an interest in teaching. I didn't envision myself as being an academic, as I have turned out to be, because I loved the profession so deeply. I loved design. I loved creating things, and I was in hog heaven, really, working on projects, but I met somebody who was teaching at Thames Polytechnic Landscape Architecture School in London, and they invited me to do some guest lecturer and that grew into part time studio. So I would go twice a week for three hours in the afternoon, and I really enjoyed that. I still never thought education was my future, but it did begin to lead me in that direction.

AS: Michigan, Massachusetts, London, how do you get to Cache Valley, and eventually LAEP?

MT: I seem to be following a pattern that I was continually moving eastward. As part of the England experience I worked on a really large project in Iran, which was even further east, so I lived there for three months. It was designing a new capital city for the Shah of Iran, right inside Tehran. Then finally, my wife and I looked at each other sitting in England. We had continuing conversations about what our friends were doing back home. They were all building houses and settling down, and we were living in this tiny little bedsit in London, which was all that we could afford. We made the decision to move back to the states. We kind of did the grand tour of Europe to say goodbye to our freedom. We did a camping trip around the continent for six weeks. Then we moved back to the States to Michigan and we decided we wanted to head west.

I had been born in Idaho. We had come west to visit relatives, my grandmother, frequently. I loved the mountains, I loved the environment, I loved the open space. We just basically decided we were going to pack up and head west. We got to Denver right in the height of a recession. I went knocking on doors of landscape architects and everybody had the sorry sign out, so nothing panned out. A good friend of mine, who I had met at Harvard, actually had grown up in Logan, Utah. His name was Richard Shaw. His father was on the faculty at Utah State in botany. Richard had gone through the landscape architecture program at Utah State. Richard and his wife travelled Europe with us on our grand tour. We were both unemployed. He had just finished at Harvard, and we kind of made a wager to see who would get the first job when we got back to the states. I was

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skunked in Denver, nothing. And one night I got a call from Richard, and he said, "Hey Timmons, how many job offers did you get?" and I said, "none." And he said, "I've come up with two and I am trying to decide which one to take. I'll take one and I'll give you the other." I said, "Cool, where are they." He said, "Well, one of them is right here in Logan with a little firm that is just getting off the ground, and it is a great opportunity. I grew up in Logan and I kind of want to get out of here." He said the other one was with a couple of guys in Aspen, Colorado, who had been teaching at NC State in landscape architecture. They had gotten a contract with the Aspen Ski Corporation that required them to move to Aspen for a period of time. They decided they would hang a shingle and start this practice. Richard said, "I think I am going to join them, I would be the third person in the firm and I will just see where that goes. You can go to Logan." He went to Aspen and the firm he joined grew into Design Workshop which is now 150 strong and five different offices.

I came to Logan and began working for a really small design firm called Land Design. I too was the third person in that office. I hadn't planned it this way, I wasn't really thinking again about academia, and did not honestly realize that after I had left Harvard one of our main faculty members at the Graduate School of Design, Richard Toth, had moved from Harvard to USU to become department head of the landscape architecture program. After I took the job in the small firm here, this was 1977, I found out that Dick was here of course. It was a small town. We started talking and he said, "geez, you ought to try teaching." I started doing some part time teaching and that coming summer a job opened up full time on the faculty. I applied and have been here ever since. Kind of strange story in terms of how one ends up in academia, and in Logan, Utah.

AS: As you start full time in LAEP, what kind of role are you asked to fill?

MT: It is interesting because Dick Toth had brought with him the Harvard based model of large scale environmental planning, computer based planning. The Department, particularly the Graduate Program, had moved in that direction in the couple years before I got here. One of my favorite courses at Harvard was a course in air photo interpretation, taught by Doug Way, and I really enjoyed that. One of the things that Dick wanted to have here as part of the program was a course in air photo interpretation. I said I could do

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that. I loved it. That was one of the things that I was hired with a sort of understanding that I would teach. In addition to that, site analysis as it related to a lot of the graduate education, again at Harvard, and then, just basic design. I think those were the key things that I started with, but what is interesting is how that has all evolved over the years, because to date I believe that I have taught every class in the curriculum in the Department of LAEP at Utah State. We all, in those days, were “jacks of all trades”. It was very common for faculty to have a BLA and a MLA degree, and almost all of us had worked professionally in practice or public practice. So there was a core of six faculty, I think I was maybe the sixth, all of whom could virtually teach anything in the program. I wouldn't claim that it was necessarily great, but we could cover it because we had all practiced it and had backgrounds in it.

Over the years my contributions broadened into all sorts of things. Fairly quickly I focused in on Landscape history and recreational open space planning and design. A lot of my practice experience had been in planning and design of recreational open spaces, parks and so forth, so I had a real passion for that and I was really anxious to bring those experiences into the classroom. The history part, that was kind of funny because history used to be this sort of subject that no one wanted to teach. You would kind of sit around the faculty meeting and looking to next year asking who is going to teach history? We had gone through, in the short time that I had been here, a couple of different folks. Paul Salisbury taught that course and then Gere Smith. Both of them had left USU. Gere had left to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. I remember distinctly the faculty meeting, sitting around and saying OK, who is going to teach history. I was so interested in history, partly again it was my travels, having lived in England, having visited all the great wonderful gardens in Europe. I remember this kind of little tentative movement of my hand as I volunteered and everyone said, 'aha'. That was in 1980, so I have been teaching history ever since. You talk about how the role one was hired for and how that kind of transforms over time, and that is basically that story, not to say that you don't get pulled out and plugged in to other places along the way wherever there is need.

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AS: You mentioned how LAEP, especially the graduate program, had a transplanted Harvard environmental planning aspect to it, how has the emphases of the program changed over time?

MT: The 1970's, I mentioned this earlier when I talked about my own undergraduate training and some of the influences of the time. The early 1970's was a time of all this incredible environmental legislation. Everything, you have the clean air act, the EIS requirement. So many laws were being passed during the LBJ era and Nixon, and all of that sort of played into this emergence of the concern of landscape architects for larger scale situations. Even before I arrived at Utah State, when Dick Toth came, that became a strong emphasis in the program, and that persisted well into the 80's. Throughout the first half of the 1980s, I'd say the environmental planning program was the real pull of the Masters in Landscape Architecture program at USU. As was the case elsewhere, I think throughout the country, that love affair, for whatever reasons, that sort of passion for the larger scale work began to wane and revert back more to some of the older roots of the profession, going back to design and private/public practice. I would say that by the mid to late 1980s that had switched significantly and we had moved away and back more to kind of traditional values in the program.

AS: How did that play out in the curriculum and how you taught classes?

MT: I mentioned that we were all jacks of all trade. The core faculty that was here when I joined the faculty, most of those folks, well all of those folks, had come on board from 1970 onward, so when I joined in 1978 full time, I was the last of that group, but there were probably six or seven of us who all had training and background in all aspects of LA. I'd say the biggest change perhaps in the curriculum has been a result the retirement of a lot of that core group. There came a time, if everyone was being hired in the 1970s, ten years ago, thinking around 2000 or early 2000s, that generation began to retire and in replace we were hiring a new type of academician. Folks who had specialties in different kinds of areas and did not have the BLA, MLA, professional practice kind of background, and you begin to see echoes of that in the curriculum, in terms of the curriculum reflecting some of the areas of specialization of newer faculty.

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AS: Where did this specialization amongst faculty come from, thinking about landscape architecture education?

MT: That is another interesting question. Historically, as I mentioned, the model for LA educators was to get the BLA/MLA. Research and publication took sort of a back seat in our profession. Most of us did applied research, in the sense that we would practice, we would work in the summer time for firms, we would design things and build things. That was seen as basically applied research, and that was fully acceptable and expected by programs of landscape architecture. That all began to shift, I would have to say probably sometime in the late 1980s, it began elsewhere and gradually caught up with us at Utah State. The expectation from the administration and peers and CELA (Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture) that landscape architecture education needed to shift with the times, that we needed to be evaluated with academic peers and other disciplines, and they were publishing and doing scholarly research. As that sort of expectation changed in academia, that met up with the same time period that we were losing a lot of folks to retirement. So with subsequent hires beginning in the 1990s, particular throughout the 2000s, it's been a different playing field. When applicants apply for positions the dean, the provost, the presidents are not necessarily looking for someone who has a beautiful portfolio and can go out and design something and get it built. They want to see publication in scholarly journals. That shift has come to our Department in LAEP, but it's happened nationwide and worldwide. It's something frequently discussed at CELA meetings and academicians, because it has really made for change. There are good things and there are not so good things about those changes, and I think, unlike the old days when any faculty member could walk into a design studio and help students understand design, it is not necessarily that way anymore. You might have someone specializing in storm water runoff, or social issues, or something that we probably would have used to have seen as being a lot more peripheral to the main stream of the profession. There is good along with not so good that comes from that.

AS: You have mentioned the idea of practice as applied research, what are some of the applied research that you took as summer work or professional practice?

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MT: I mentioned my interest in recreation and I did several projects. I actually took a year leave from the university to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Minneapolis. I was in charge of the master planning for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area. It was a thirty six mile long corridor, newly designated by congress along the Minnesota River, right starting in the twin cities and going upstream for thirty six miles. It was a great project. We were planning and designing for wildlife and people along this same narrow strip of land.

I worked on projects with the Forest Service, local here, and those were all recreation focused things. I kept my design hand fresh by doing residential design projects for folks here in town. A number of years ago, I was blessed with getting a sabbatical leave from the University, which is one of the great things about academia, when you apply for sabbatical and are given that time to recreate yourself or explore new things or something that you have a passion for that there is no way you can get done with the normal demands of teaching. In this sabbatical, about ten years ago, I went to Massachusetts and interned with the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation. It was a wonderful experience. I had an office in Frederick Laws Olmsted's former bedroom, in his home and office, which is now one of the smallest units of the national parks system. I sat there and learned about historic preservation and all of the cutting edge things that the National Park Service was doing at that point. That served as a spring board for me when I returned from that sabbatical to get to follow up with a number of projects with the National Parks Service dealing with historic preservation.

In more recent years my areas of scholarly focus, if you would, have been in cultural landscape inventories, cultural landscape reports, other cultural and historic landscape projects, whether it be Timpanogos Cave national monument, portions of the Tetons, Little Bighorn Battlefield. There was one project involving the International Klondike Gold Rush Trail, which traced the route of the Klondike gold rush from Seattle all the way up to the Yukon Territory. I worked for a couple of years with the Park Service on that particular project, sort of a heritage tourism project. On all of these projects, it has been great to involve graduate students and provide them funding and exposure to cultural landscapes and historic landscapes.

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AS: Speaking of the students you work with, as you reflect back on your time and the students, can you make a generalizations regarding the demographics, who was coming through the program, how has the group changed?

MT: There has been a tremendous change in the time that I have been here. I was very surprised when I started teaching in the late 70s, how many out of state students there were in the landscape architecture program. I kind of gravitated into the position of becoming undergraduate coordinator and director, so a lot of time for a couple of decades I spent dealing primarily with the undergraduates, and understanding their needs and so forth. I did a lot of statistical work looking at our student body, and it is pretty amazing now to go back and look at the demographics from the late 70s, because there was a time period, when I started here, that sixty percent of our students were from out of state. I was very surprised by that, but apparently, and I had to hear this story from some of my predecessors who had joined the faculty a few years earlier, Logan had gained a reputation in the mid or early 70s as being kind of a rowdy place, a party school, if you can believe that about Logan, Utah. There were certain things that attracted this kind of different group from the east coast. They would come to Utah State to study natural resources, forestry and also landscape architecture. That profile of heavy out of state influence in the student body continued into the 1980s and then we started watching this gradual decline to the point that by the late 80s early 90s the profile had completely flip-flopped to where we would have only maybe ten percent or less out of state students. I would say that profile has pretty much maintained to the current time. I think that has been one of the most significant and note worthy changes in terms of students.

I think our students throughout my time here have always been very focused and dedicated to what they want to do. Everybody knows that one doesn't enter LA looking for the easy way out or the short number of hours working on their degree program, it takes a huge time investment and I have been so proud of the students we've had throughout my time. Whether out of state students early on or instate students, the dedication to the program has been noteworthy. We have always had a pretty high profile of older students and married students since so many of our students go on LDS missions then return and get married and raise a family. Our age profile is much higher than

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typical landscape architecture programs throughout the country, and this is undergraduate primarily I am speaking of.

AS: How about the LAEP student body as compared to the rest of the University?

MT: We always had a very creative bunch, and like I said, the demands of the program really require a lot of time spent in the studio. I would maybe say that our students tend to live in the studio and take classes with each other and become very closely bonded. Probably much more so than the student body at large. I sense that in dealing with our alumni, everybody stays so close, and I think that has to do with the relatively small size of our program, roughly twenty five undergraduates and five graduates per year pretty much going over the same courses over the same period of time. You get to know all of your colleagues for a while, and I think that sticks with you.

AS: Another thing that is very emphasized in the Department is travel for the students, I am wondering if you could reflect on some of the travel opportunities you have had with students?

MT: We've had a tradition since before I came here of taking spring break field trips. That was pretty much the extent of it until I floated the idea in the mid 80s of extended field trips. Both in 1984 and 1986 I took groups of students to Europe for extended periods. First one was six weeks in the summer time, the second one was ten weeks for an entire quarter in England. There have been many other great travel experiences to parts of California, the Pacific Northwest, Italy. One of the really wonderful things, I think, that the department started was about ten years ago when we institutionalized the travel experienced and made it a mandatory aspect of the program for graduation. I feel, based on my travel experiences and the exposure I had, that travel is critical to us, as landscape architects. It's critical to our creative process. It's critical to understanding how people interact with each other. You just can't experience that if you don't get out of Cache Valley, or out of Utah, or out of the Intermountain West. I think requiring this travel program has been one of the really wonderful things we have done over the last ten years.

AS: You mentioned earlier working at Harvard with the punch card computer, how have you seen technology change and advance landscape architecture?

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MT: That has been absolutely amazing. I go back to, and this is really dating myself, but I remember my graphics class at Michigan State and some of the students had these really cool old rapidograph pens, which were pens that had a little ink cartridge and you fill them with ink and you would sort of shake them and a little nib came down. It was kind of like a sharpie, but you had different sizes of them. They were wonderful, but they could also be disastrous, because sometimes the pen would stick and you would get ink blobs all over the place. Before I could afford rapidograph, I was using the really old school pens that had the little nibs that you had to pinch together with a screw and drop a glob of ink between the nibs and then try to draw lines with that. So how has technology changed? It is unbelievable now to walk through the studios and see everyone doing things on computer and a whole different way of thinking and designing. I think technologically we were, I have to admit, a little bit late at USU in embracing technological change. I don't think we got rid of our ammonia fume blue ray blueprint machine until about ten years ago. We really stuck with hand graphics, but I think, whether it's Photoshop or AutoCAD, or Indesign, or whatever type of technology we are using now, it has completely transformed the studio, not necessarily all for the good. I have a bit of an issue with that, because I feel that often times students rely on the computer, they are not really thinking. They are thinking whatever comes off their computer is good, because the computer did it. Well, a computer is only as good as the ideas going into it, and that is one of the reasons that we still require hand graphics to be taught. Some of us require that some of our studio projects be designed and drawn by hand, so that we have got that hand eye coordination, and we are not just flipping on switches and thinking that something is automatically going to be good because it comes from a computer.

AS: Were there times that you felt the department was leading in innovation? Was there also times when you felt the department was lagging behind, such as the technology?

MT: I think that the technology was the biggest time lag issue that we ever really faced, but I would say there were particular areas, we would call it service learning now, but I would say hands-on studio approach to real world problems solving. I think we have been cutting edge for a long time in that area. When I started here, we called it Environmental

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Field Service, and we would work with communities, or agencies, or what be it, and develop projects that students would work on and they would be real world projects. That eventually sort of morphed into bringing all of these real world projects into design studios. As I have interacted with colleagues elsewhere in the country over the years, that has always seemed like something where we have been ahead and others have been envious because they haven't pushed that as much.

AS: Since you brought up environmental Field Service, can we spend a little more time talking about what they were and how they interacted with communities?

MT: When it was called the Environmental Field Service program, again this is something that Dick Toth brought with him from Harvard, there was a field service program at Harvard where they actually had a fulltime person running that program, so they would work with communities soliciting projects almost on an extension sort of basis, bring projects in that then students would work on as kind of their major project. When Dick Toth brought that idea here it was a little bit smaller scale. We never had a fulltime coordinator of that program, but we would work with various communities. For instance I worked with Wellsville and the town of Mendon developing master plans for both of them. This would be, actually, outside and beyond the regular required course work in their curriculum. We would run it as an elective course and try to get students interested enough to sign up and take it just for the love of learning and participating with communities. That's been sort of the history of the Environmental Field Service, but it has continued in all kinds of iterations. Our extension program in the Department, which Dave Bell now runs, it is very well known for the work they do, the community outreach sort of work.

Ten years ago we took it in a different direction by starting the departmental charrette, which is something we have done every year now for ten years. That involves canceling all of our departmental courses, all of our major course for a week of time, and pooling all of our students together, from freshman to third year grad students. They work with each other in cross class teams of ten or so, and we give them problems from a particular community, last year was Brigham City. These students have to define various problems and then set about solving them, coming up with design proposals in a one week period

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of time. It is really crunch time during those charrettes, but we have produced some wonderful work for a lot of communities.

AS: I am curious about the culture of design studios. How do they work? What has been your experience with it? How has it evolved?

MT: The design studio is something really unique. The foundation goes way back to the early years of the profession of LA. Before there were any programs of LA, anybody who wanted to become a landscape architect had to find a landscape architect who was willing to take on an apprentice and basically attach themselves to this person. They would learn through the school of hard knocks, and it was essentially the beginning of the studio process. You would be sitting in an office design studio learning on the job, and you would be charged with every type of task along the way, and that was how you learned. When formalized education in landscape architecture began in 1899/1900, and growing gradually through the century that model was adopted and taken from working in a private studio to recreating a similar kind of experience in the studio space. This same sort of system was used where you had a professor who would hover around, ask you to do things, and work with you as a student to try and bring your design and your thoughts out of the work that you were doing. I think it's an incredibly strong process. I think it's a great way of learning and I hope that it continues. If I can speak about one little worry that I have, there is more and more attention being given to distance learning and learning on web based platforms. There are folks who are trying to translate the studio experience into the distance learning format. I don't think there can ever be a substitute, sitting in front of a computer screen miles away from the major professor, where you are able to interact on that one on one basis and sketch on each other's work and get the hands on interaction that the studio process allows and encourages.

AS: The studio process is very time consuming, and requires a lot of the time of the professors and students. How does this fit into the conversation of how many years an undergrad education should be, four or five years? How is landscape architecture education going to adapt to the modern packaging of higher education?

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MT: It is a slow process. It takes maturation. There are probably ways to accelerate some parts of learning, and I think there are ways to do self paced learning, particularly in some courses, perhaps landscape history or construction. I think the design studio is still going to be time intensive. It's interesting that you mention five year undergraduate programs, if anything we keep adding in this profession. We've undergone such incredible boundary expansions and I think that is part in parcel of our being as a profession that we just keep moving laterally as new things come on line. We embrace it and it has a lot to do with what we teach, the way that we think holistically. We think process oriented. A lot of that thinking can transcend into lots of different areas. Certainly one of the battles that we are always having as faculty is how do we maintain compactness of the curriculum, so that students get through in a reasonable amount of time, and yet at the same time embrace all of the new things that are coming on the scene?

AS: What have been some of the internal discussions about how to keep the education moving well?

MT: It is very cyclical. We go through an accreditation process, so the LAAB (Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board) accredits programs of landscape architecture, they make regular visits every six years. They scrutinize a program to make sure that we are meeting the requirements to grant accredited degrees in landscape architecture. One of the things that they look at is the sanity of the teaching load and the sanity of expectation on students. As I have watched us go through accreditation reviews over the last twenty years, we will have an accreditation team come in and look at our programs, they will say you guys are nuts, you guys are killing yourselves, you're killing your students, there are too many required courses, how do you do all this stuff? They will charge us with examining the curriculum and trying to whittle away at unnecessary things. We will go through this period of self-scrutiny and set up flow charts, and charts on the wall, and examine every course and see where we can combine things and cut things down. We will knock maybe ten credits out the undergraduate program and three or four credits out of the graduate program. Then over the next few years we will hire a new faculty member who has a specialization in something and we will say, "Gosh, that is really cool stuff, that is really important for someone to learn." We will first offer it as an elective and then

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it will sort of catch attention, and more and more people will start taking it, and then we will say, "Everybody really should have that, we will add it as a requirement." Honestly you can look back over twenty years and you can see it. You asked about scrutiny of the curriculum and how we deal with that, and that's basically it, we'll cut things when someone calls it to our attention, and we'll get down to barebones, and then this mission creep will start to build it up again.

AS: You were reflecting on accreditation process and internal processes of the department, did you ever have concerns about the future of the Department?

MT: It is always dicey when you are such a small program. We have grown by one or two faculty since the time I have been here. We had about ten shortly after I joined. A couple others were hired after I was hired. Then it dropped down a little bit, seven or eight, now we are back up to ten or eleven. Every faculty member is critical to the equation, because we do cover so much. When I talked about the early years of the program, when everyone was sort of a jack of all trades, and we could step in and cover things, it wasn't such a concern then, but over the last decade and a half, with the retirement of those folks that had such a broad skill set, to a realm of more specialist, it can become a concern if one does not really carefully cover all of those bases. One can find the department, and it's just a concern, it's not saying its happened or is bound to happen, or not going to happen, but were we to get too many specialist who couldn't cover a lot of the core courses in bases, and they are sort of off doing specialized research, and something that doesn't apply to that core that we still have to know as landscape architects. The employers out there, private practice and public practice, hire our graduates for a certain skill set. They have expectations of what we produce. Incidentally, I will add this in now, we have always been known, USU has a long tradition of producing people who can really get the job done when they are hired by an office. They are pragmatic and also creative at the same time, and they land in an office on their feet and start working, and get that work done. In order to continue meeting that expectation of employers of our alumni, we have to make sure that we are covering all those bases. That would be a concern to just lay out there, would be insuring that we have that strong balance of good design thickeners and doers.

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AS: What would you describe as being the high points of the Department, in general, over its history?

MT: Around the time I joined the faculty in the late 70s, the program was growing by leaps and bounds. If you were to look at a curve of students in the program, when the program was founded in 1939 there were two students who started here, and then during the war years it was very lean, then with the returning G.I's it grew, but that curve just kept going up and up and up. When I joined the program was getting huge, and I recall a faculty meeting in 1979/80 when we said, 'ok we have got to address this issue because everything is going crazy, we've got forty students in the senior class, I think it was even pushing fifty. We didn't have enough desks, we couldn't grade all the projects, we couldn't accomplish anything. At that point we implemented the program of matriculation where undergraduate student had to prove themselves by the end of the sophomore year, and we would then except only the top twenty five students. To get back to the highs and the lows, ironically, I would say that one of the highs was that period when we had such a high enrollment. Despite the fact that there were huge numbers, and very large numbers of grad students too, there was also corresponding energy that goes along with that. There was just such a buzz. It was killing everybody, it was killing the faculty, killing the students, but I would say in terms of recognition of the program and things were being accomplished, probably that period, late 70s early 80s, was a high point. There are lots of highs, when you are in this business and every time a new class of students are coming through and see what their personalities are, there are highs about that. Getting our new building built, I call it new, it's not new anymore, 79/80 we occupied it, and that was a real high, and that coincided with that high bubble of student population. Joining the college of Agriculture, which we did three years ago, was a mile stone for us, and another high, because it moved us into a whole different arena of recognition.

AS: So that was the highs for the department, reflecting on you personally and your career, what are your personal accomplishments?

MT: The biggest high is when I see alumni of the program who I have had a part in their education and success as a landscape architect. There is nothing more wonderful then getting together with alumni, whether it's at an ASLA(American Society of Landscape

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Architects) meeting or a class reunion. That's a huge high. I think, personally, some of the project work with the National Parks Service have been a real high. The international experiences, those are always a lot of work to put together, but you come out of those with an incredible feeling of bonding with the students that you've lived and travelled with during that period of time. Those are some of the highs.

AS: What do you see as your legacy or contribution to the department over all these many years?

MT: A couple of things. I would like to think that continuing the tradition as folks have retired. I think I have been able to serve as kind of an institutional memory bridge, hopefully, over a gap. I think that's important and significant. Where I have taken the Landscape History course has been very important. I think it has moved to a level that is very much appreciated by students and has quite high accolades. I think my approach to design studios, and maybe there is nothing particularly unique about his, but I would like to think that I've contributed to a congenial and vibrant learning atmosphere in the studios, and hope that would be a legacy that I would be remembered for.

AS: With the Department turning seventy five, and speaking looking forward, what do you see as the challenges and the opportunities as it enters its last quarter century?

MT: It is a huge challenge. There are so many things out there that could happen, some of them good, some not so good. I think we just really need to keep on our toes and keep our fingers to the wind and see what ways are shifting. I already mentioned the distant ed. issue. I think there are pros and cons of that. I would like to think that on the positive side, that we could disperse the good things that we have to share with others. We here at Utah State, we can disperse that globally. On the more cautious side, I would bristle a bit at the thought that distance ed. might someday replace studio learning, and that would be a concern. I would want to be the little voice up in the rafters shouting, "No, don't do that, keep the good process!"

We are coming out of a recession right now, and the last few years have been difficult for landscape architecture. I see that as changing dramatically and picking up. It was probably seven years ago I attended an ASLA meeting and sat in on this CEO roundtable

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with all these principals of major firms. At that point I was acting department head, which is why I was in that meeting, and the CEOs were literally scolding us educators for not producing enough students. They said we can't get enough students, and they had an independent study done, the CEOs, a growth curve for the profession of landscape architecture, and it was projected to go up astronomically at the same time it met a retirement curve of baby boomers, like myself. That was a huge growth period for landscape architecture, and if you look at that point at the profile of firms and public practice, you would see all these folks in there sort of late 50s moving into 60s. That is colliding with this growing demand for landscape architects. So what the CEOs were concerned about was that we weren't adding new programs, we weren't expanding our capacity within existing programs, so that challenge was laid out there. Now, recession obviously has put that growth curve on hold, but I think from talking with many others, the expectation is once you know we are just starting cautiously out of it now, once we pass through that threshold, all of that pent up demand is going to add to the point that that growth curve was projected to be at. It is going to be a seller's market and I think students coming out of landscape architecture programs are going to see salaries climb. They are going to see all kinds of job opportunities.

Now where that leads the future of our program is how do we respond to that? Do we try to grow our program? We have self imposed a matriculation review and a cut of twenty five students and that has been governed by the size of our faculty, the size of our facilities, a number of things, but if this growing demand emerges, how do we respond to that? Do we double our faculty and double the size of our studios and squeeze that many more people into the rooms. One concern that I would have would be that that pent up demand for landscape architectural education might be picked up by one of our rivals to the south of us, somebody like BYU or U of U, who both programs have sort of eyed landscape architecture for a number of years, and have started pre landscape architecture programs and have served as feeders to us for our MLA program. For instance, it doesn't take too much out there thinking to see somebody down there picking up on the notion that there are all of these Utah parents who's students want to be landscape architects and they can't get into the program at Utah State because of an imposed cut, and they say, "Well, we will find a program and take care of that." I would be nervous about that. Not

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that I shy away from the competition, but I just don't know if we are quite big enough professionally and population wise in the state to handle a couple of schools.

AS: What trends do you see emerging that are going to dictate landscape education in the future? Where are things going?

MT: I have already mentioned a couple, and I will just go back to those again. I think the whole question of scholarship, how are we going to reconcile this notion of scholarship in a profession that historically is applied. Scholarship is very necessary, there are new ideas that need to be explored and discovered, and implemented into the profession, so it's kind of a two way street. Looking at how to marry what academics develops and bring that into private practice. Then there is this need for grounding and continuing some of the old ways of educating. I see that as a challenge, both in the educational sector and in the profession of landscape architecture. I think we are going to keep growing our boundaries in landscape architecture. We have been going through this boom of sustainability, the buzz word sustainability, and turning things green, green roofs, green infrastructure, and that's huge. That's going to become more and more pressing with population growth and development of our landscape. I think landscape architecture is going to continue to be pushed in that area, but the whole area of social concern, social equity, social justice, I think those are areas that we are also going to be growing into as we deal with issues of immigration and changing demographics in the country, that is all going to impact and affect the profession of landscape architecture.