

Purpose of the Project:

Mira Costa Community College is located in Northern San Diego County and covers 125 acres that serves 20,000 students. With the emergence of increased environmental awareness and the pending green technology boom, the College is trying to position themselves as a leader in environmental vocational education. In an effort to forward Mira Costa's strong commitment to the environment, they commissioned a Landscape and Facilities Master Plan to be grounded in environmentally sensitive practices. The primary goals of the Mira Costa Landscape and Facilities Master Plan will establish an open space network that functions as a complex and multi-layered system to enhance connectivity, strengthens programmatic relationships, and enhance the overall environmental health of the campus and surrounding community.

Role of the Landscape Architect:

With the recent surge in student enrollment and continued projected growth the college is looking to expand classrooms and office space while it struggles with a current parking shortage. Located along the western edge of campus is an existing SDG&E utility corridor which travels through the heart of the County wide MHCP wildlife corridor and continues north into Camp Pendleton. The Landscape Architect was the central figure working with college administration to relocate future planned parking areas and new classrooms buildings to the east side of campus, which helps position the utility corridor to play a vital role in campus education and increase awareness of the regional ecosystem of northern San Diego County. The Landscape Master Plan will repurpose the existing underutilized utility corridor as a functional habitat that can be linked into the larger regional matrix, and contribute to a healthier environment while providing a tangible educational tool for students and the local community.

Significance:

Another key goal of the Landscape Master Plan is to enhance environmental educational opportunities by creating a landscape framework that creates stronger physical and programmatic connections throughout campus. This open space hierarchy will create space that encourages classroom instruction to extend beyond the confines of classroom walls. By creating a living environmental research laboratory that highlights environmental processes and sustainable practices that students learn about in the classroom, a new way of teaching and learning can emerge, where students begin to see the interrelationships between geology, horticulture, biology, and physics. Understanding these interrelationships will equip students with a stronger analytic foundation that will help them succeed later in their careers. The outdoor classroom also has the ability to open up environmental education to the surrounding community via weekend workshops and lectures. After careful study of the College's curriculum and course offerings, and several meetings with faculty and administration, the Landscape Architect developed an outdoor classroom map that highlights specific locations on campus where classes can meet individually or collectively with other classes to explore a collaborative hands-on learning process. Once these open space corridors are understood as being an integral part of a larger regional matrix, they will take on an identity that can be preserved, maintained, and improved over future generations.

Special Factors:

With over 2,000 acres of fresh water and salt water lagoons, Northern San Diego County is home to some of the most productive wildlife habitat areas within California. This area has also seen unprecedented residential and commercial growth over the past 30 years that has been detrimental to the environmental health of the region. The Mira Costa campus is located along the eastern edge of the NCCP mandated Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan (MHCP) wildlife corridor that extends north to Camp Pendleton and south to the 78 freeway. This corridor located along the Mira Costa's western edge, will serve as a catalyst for public awareness and education of Northern San Diego's regional ecosystem.