

## **PROJECT IDENTITY & LOCATION**

California State University, Northridge, Oasis Wellness Center, Northridge, CA

## **PURPOSE OF PROJECT**

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is one of the first universities to incorporate a wellness center that is specifically designed to contribute to student success and retention while enhancing the student life experience. The Oasis addresses issues revealed in surveys and research conducted by the university's Student Union Services. They found that CSUN's students were above average on the American College Health Association's top two health impediments: stress and lack of sleep. The wellness center is designed to be a "learning laboratory" where students can find respite in unique interior and exterior spaces to address their out-of-balance lifestyles and health.

## **ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT**

A multidiscipline team facilitated a holistic approach to the site. The existing building and under-utilized landscape were collectively transformed to support the program for the project. Biophilia and an interior/exterior connection inspired the site design. The creation of "outdoor rooms" allows for private lounging and retreat with the center providing amenities such as a sculpture garden, Zen garden, flexible yoga/meditation spaces and an amphitheater with fireplace to support the services offered at Oasis. The wellness center has created a new model for outdoor instruction on campus with students engaging in the variety of programs and workshops such as yoga, guided meditation, massage and art therapy.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Oasis Wellness Center was a unique undertaking, driven by a focus on students and the belief that context can impact learning and health. It is well documented that characteristics of an interior space, such as lighting, air quality, and thermal comfort each have effects on learning. Lesser known are the effects that the exterior environment and connection to nature have with recent studies and research showing that simple gestures such as views to nature have positive effects on both cognition and stress recovery. The hypothesis is that there is a restorative effect on students through an immersion in the natural environment which can provide recovery from stress and sleep deprivation. The final program elements, such as soothing music and sounds throughout the spaces, dense flora, and a focus on biophilic design all influenced the distinctive sense of place, precious for a university.

The center initiates the goal that students would carry these experiences in health, wellness, and mindfulness with them when moving beyond their time at CSUN into productive and successful careers to influence society. We believe the Oasis Wellness Center will be a wellspring for future collegiate models. While campus landscapes often focus on group activities and sport/athletic facilities, it is rare that a space be so carefully programmed, designed and developed for individual retreat in outdoor rooms for rejuvenation of the mind and soul. The Center averages nearly 500 visitors on peak days during the week and has logged over 2,500 nap pod reservations. There are numerous workshops offered, including mindfulness, yoga, art therapy and meditation. Response from students has been extremely affirmative; their general consensus being, "We needed this!" and "Where has this been?" The Oasis demonstrates the university's commitment to promote lifelong learning with a unique approach to student's wellness. The center champions a connection with nature as a major contributor to student's health and the ability to reset mind and body balance. It proves that big things, do in fact, sometimes come in a small package.

## **SPECIAL FACTORS**

The challenge of a small, remote, shady, and depressed site on campus became an opportunity to create a unique experience of disembarking down to the Oasis. While descending to the facility, one starts to sense a change in scale, transitioning to an intimate and tranquil space; one literally departs the main campus above to arrive at the wellness center embraced by a lush landscape. The contemplative gardens utilize the gifts of the site to create multiple outdoor rooms, private in scale, that take advantage of borrowed landscape, secluded spaces and nature's ability to reset our minds and body.