

Landscape Architects



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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Occupational Subtitles:

- Landscape Contractors

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Architects
- Community Planners
- Environmental Planners
- School-Plant Consultants

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Agricultural-Engineering Technicians
- Airport Engineers
- Civil Engineers
- Railroad Engineers

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Commercial and Industrial Designers
- Interior Designers
- Art Directors
- Surveyors

Noteworthy Quote:

“Outdoor spaces enrich the human spirit and add immeasurably to our quality of life. The work landscape architects do and spaces they create are so very versatile...function[ing] in times of joy and in times of sorrow. [These spaces]...allow us to connect with nature...[and] reaffirm the role landscape architects play in creating a sense of community and in strengthening society.”
 – Leonard Hopper, 2001 President of the American Society of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects (ˈland-scape ˈar-chi-tects) plan and design land areas for commercial, industrial, and residential sites, such as housing complexes, college campuses, hospitals, shopping centers, highways, parks and playgrounds, golf courses, and industrial parks. They make sure that the natural environment, beauty, and function of the land are completely compatible.

Landscape architects develop master plans for public and private properties, including commercial, residential, and recreational sites. They use their knowledge and skills to plan an environment that uses the land wisely, serves the needs of the people, and has artistic appeal. A major concern is the design of structures that will have a minimal impact on the natural surroundings. They also apply their knowledge and skills to the areas of historic preservation, and the conservation and reclamation of natural resources.

Work Performed

Landscape architects work with clients to prepare a program of development that will meet the clients' needs, wishes, and budget, as well as any construction requirements and government regulations. But before they present a proposal for the development of a site, landscape architects must learn all they can about the site. They analyze natural features of a site, such as climate, water supply, soil, slope of the land, and existing structures, plants, and trees. They consider different views of the site, shady and sunny spaces, and utilities, if any. Landscape architects must also take into account any federal, state, or local regulations, including those preserving historic sites or natural resources such as wetlands or forests.

When analyzing and preparing designs for a site, landscape architects often confer with other professionals such as engineers, other architects, city officials, and zoning experts. They confer with real estate agents and brokers, horticulturists, and others concerned with the project, including the users and community impacted by the project. Landscape architects may work with architects, surveyors, and engineers, for instance, to fit buildings on the land and to make the best use of environmental features such as ventilation, sunlight, and scenery. Together, they plan the placement of roadways, walks and steps, fences, lights, vegetation, decorative features, and outdoor furniture. Working with environmental scientists or foresters, they design irrigation systems, storm drain systems, signs, and other components of a site.

After studying and analyzing the site, landscape architects prepare preliminary designs. To account for the needs of the client as well as the conditions at the site, they frequently make changes before a final design is approved. Many landscape architects use computer-aided design and drafting (CADD) software programs to prepare their plans. In addition, landscape architects may use video simulations to help clients visualize and understand their ideas. For larger scale site planning, landscape architects may also use geographic information systems technology—computer mapping systems.

Landscape architects continue to consult with other professionals involved in the project throughout all phases of the planning and design. Once the design is complete, landscape architects prepare a proposal for approval by the client and all appropriate regulatory agencies. The proposal includes detailed plans of the

site, including written reports, sketches, models, photographs, land-use studies, and cost estimates.

When the plans are approved, landscape architects prepare final working drawings showing all existing and proposed features. They prepare a detailed outline of the methods of construction for buildings, roads, walks, terraces, fountains, and vegetation. Plans and drawings show proposed grading, drainage, layout of roads and utility lines, and other information, such as the layout and arrangement of flowers, shrubs, trees, fountains, and other decorative features. Landscape architects also draw up lists of materials required for the project.

These drawings, specifications, and lists of materials go to contractors or developers who direct the actual completion of the work. **Landscape contractors**, for instance, usually direct landscaping and other grounds maintenance workers involved in the installation of plants and other landscaping designs. They do not, however, typically create the landscape designs (more information on these and other landscaping professionals is available in a separate brief on *Landscape architects*). Throughout construction, landscape architects regularly inspect the site to ensure compliance with specifications, approve quality of materials and work, and advise client and construction personnel.

Some landscape architects design the construction of all kinds of projects. Others do specific kinds of work or certain stages of a project. They may specialize in the design of parks and playgrounds, golf courses and other outdoor recreational facilities, shopping centers, street and highway beautification, waterfront improvement projects, or resorts, housing, and other residential developments. Some concentrate on certain activities relative to landscape architecture such as regional planning and resource management; feasibility, environmental impact assessment, and cost studies; or site construction.

Some may design whole towns, satellite cities around central cities, or multiple-use plans for national forests. This work requires extensive research and analysis. Landscape architects confer with experts on population distribution, planning and zoning departments, traffic engineers, park and recreation departments, and other public agencies and offices. Landscape architects are increasingly becoming involved with environmental remediation projects, such as preservation and restoration of wetlands or abatement of stormwater run-off. They are also playing a greater role in historic landscape preservation and restoration.

Some landscape architects restore degraded land, such as mines and landfills. Others use their skills in traffic-calming, the art of slowing traffic down through use of traffic design, enhancement of the physical environment, and greater attention to aesthetics. Because most residential projects are too small to offer a suitable income, relatively few landscape architects exclusively do landscape design for individual homeowners. Any residential work they do is generally a small part of their total workload. Some nurseries also offer landscape design services, but these services often are performed by

landscape designers, who have fewer formal credentials than landscape architects.

Working Conditions

Landscape architects spend most of their time working in an office creating plans and designs, conducting research, preparing models, figuring costs, and meeting with clients and others involved in the project. They spend the rest of their time outdoors looking at project sites or inspecting landscape construction. Landscape architects working for large firms may spend considerable time traveling to sites outside their local area. The work also requires a great deal of interaction with a variety of people: clients, engineers, landscapers, contractors, city officials, and members of regulatory boards.

Hours and Earnings

Landscape architects in salaried positions usually work a regular forty-hours a week. However, they may work long hours to meet a deadline. Self-employed landscape architects typically work variable hours, which depend on the demands of their projects. Most experienced, self-employed landscape architects work closer to fifty- or sixty-hours a week, even in regions where construction is seasonal.

The earnings of landscape architects depend on the architect's training, experience, and proven skill, as well as the employer, geographic location, and pay agreement (straight salary or salary and a percent of the profits). Earnings also depend on the number of clients, the kinds of projects, and the status of the firm. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for landscape architects was \$58,310 a year in 2004. Overall, earnings ranged from a low of around \$32,000 a year to more than \$90,000 a year. In 2005, the average salary for landscape architects employed by the federal government was \$74,508 a year.

According to the *2004 American Society of Landscape Architects Salary Survey*, the average salary for landscape architecture positions was \$74,644 a year. Most respondents had 21-25 years of experience and earned an average of \$80,273 a year. Those with 0-5 years of experience averaged \$41,803 a year; and those with 36-40 years of experience earned an average of \$97,564 a year.

Landscape architects employed by large firms or government agencies receive health insurance, paid vacations, and sick leave. Many of these workers, however, work for small firms or are self-employed. Benefits for these workers tend to be less generous than those of employees of large or government organizations.

Education and Training

An accredited bachelor's or a master's degree in landscape architecture is usually required to enter this profession. In 2004, fifty-nine colleges and universities offered seventy-seven accredited undergraduate and

graduate programs in landscape architecture. The accrediting body for these programs is the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board (LAAB) of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). High school students should take art, mechanical drawing, botany, biology, and mathematics. Good business and communications skills are important.

The bachelor's degree programs take four or five years to complete, and may be accredited by the LAAB. The master's degree as a first professional degree is a three-year program for students with an undergraduate degree in another discipline—this degree may be accredited by the LAAB. The master's degree as the second professional degree is a two-year program for students who have a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, and wish to teach or specialize in some aspect of landscape architecture, such as regional planning or golf course design—these degrees are not LAAB accredited.

University programs in landscape architecture include technical subjects such as surveying, landscape design and construction, landscape ecology, site design, and urban and regional planning. Other courses include the history of landscape architecture, plant and soil science, geology, professional practice, and general management. Design is another important part of landscape architects' studies. In design studio, students are assigned real projects to get hands-on experience. In these activities students become proficient in the use of computer-aided design (CAD), geographic information systems (GIS), and video simulation.

To gain experience and, in most states, credit toward licensure, many colleges and universities also offer internships. In fact, most employers prefer entry-level landscape architects who have completed at least one summer internship with a landscape architecture firm. Internships give students an understanding of the day-to-day operations of a small business, including how to win clients, generate fees, and work within a budget—which significantly reduces the amount of on-the-job training required.

Licensing, Certification and Professional Societies

In 2004, forty-seven states required landscape architects to be licensed or registered in order to practice. Applicants for licensure must pass the Landscape Architect Registration Examination (L.A.R.E.), sponsored by the Council of Landscape Architectural Registration Boards (CLARB). The exam is administered in two portions: graphic and multiple choice. Qualifications for the exam vary from state to state. Typically, candidates for the exam must have a degree from an accredited school, and one to four years of work experience under the guidance of a registered landscape architect.

In addition to the L.A.R.E., fourteen of these states currently require that applicants also pass a state examination in order to meet registration requirements. Completed at the end of the L.A.R.E., state examinations

focus on laws, environmental regulations, plants, soils, climate, and any other characteristics unique to the state. Because state requirements are not uniform, landscape architects might find it hard to transfer their registration from one state to another. However, candidates can satisfy requirements in most states by passing the L.A.R.E. and completing at least three years of internship experience.

Landscape architects can find additional professional support from organizations which promote their work. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), for instance, represents more than 15,000 landscape architects nationwide. ASLA is dedicated to improving public understanding of the profession and to advance the practice of landscape architecture through education, communication, publications, online services, professional interaction, and development. Another group is the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA), which represents faculty members and others interested in landscape architectural education.

Personal Qualifications

Landscape architects should have an appreciation of the environment, an awareness of human space needs, and the ability to analyze, plan, and direct a project. They should like outdoor work. Imagination, graphic design skills, an inquiring mind, and a good understanding of engineering principles are important. A good command of written and spoken English is essential in order to explain ideas, and to make presentations before clients and other groups. Self-discipline, and good business and marketing skills are also important, especially for those who choose to open their own business.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

In 2004, landscape architects held around 25,000 jobs throughout the United States. Most of these jobs were concentrated in urban and suburban areas. Almost 60 percent were employed in firms that provide architectural, landscape architectural, engineering, and landscaping services. Roughly one in four were self-employed. Most of the others worked for state and local governments. A few worked for the federal government planning and designing parks and recreation areas.

Employment Outlook

The Department of Labor Statistics expects employment of landscape architects to grow by 19.4 percent through the year 2014—an increase of around 5,000 jobs. An additional 3,000 positions are expected to open due to replacement needs. Over the long run, anticipated new construction to meet the needs of a growing population will

increase the demand for these professionals. Public interest in more beautiful spaces and rising land costs are increasing the importance of good site planning and landscape design. There is also greater demand for increased development of recreation areas, wildlife refuges, and parks.

Further adding to the demand for landscape architectural know-how is the ever increasing use of landscaping techniques to address environmental problems, such as the reclamation of mined land, and preserving or restoring wetlands and other environmentally sensitive sites. There are new demands to manage stormwater run-off in both existing and new landscapes, as well as a growing need to manage water resources in the Western states. Landscape architects will also be needed to work in historic preservation, and city and regional planning.

Although opportunities will be good overall, new graduates can expect to face competition for jobs in the largest and most prestigious landscape architecture firms. Opportunities will be best for landscape architects who have strong technical skills and a knowledge of environmental issues, codes, and regulations. Those with additional training or experience in urban planning can also increase their opportunities for employment in landscape architecture firms that specialize in site planning as well as landscape design.

Entry Methods

After completing their college degree, beginners may start as staff workers for a landscape architectural firm. They do simple design or construction drawings and gather basic project information. They may do drafting and design, make cost estimates, file documents, and write specifications. When they acquire enough experience and skill, they do more independent, creative work, prepare specifications and construction details, and take charge of some project designs.

Until they are licensed, new employees may not be called landscape architects. In some states, they may be called "apprentices" or "intern landscape architects." Their duties vary with employers. They may do project research or prepare maps of the site to be developed. Some may participate in the design of a project. Interns do all work under the supervision of a licensed landscape architect, who also signs all drawings and specifications and who takes legal responsibility for the work.

Advancement

After several years on-the-job, landscape architects may have the skills and experience to take responsibility for a project from design through all stages of production. Expert landscape architects may become project managers. Many landscape architects set up their own consulting practice. Some become owners, associates, or partners in a firm, or head an agency. Some specialize in a particular area of landscape architecture or go into teaching. After

gaining some experience, landscape architects may also become construction supervisors, or land or environmental planners.

For Further Research

American Society of Landscape Architects, 636 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Web site: www.asla.org

Council of Landscape Architectural Registration Boards, 144 Church Street, N.W., Suite 201, Vienna, VA 22180-4550. Web site: www.clarb.org

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