STUDYING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN NEW ENGLAND

It’s a growing discipline, so to speak. Applications are up. Course offerings have exploded. A number of new programs have recently launched, or are about to. Is this just a fad, or is something more significant taking hold? Sustainability, global warming, amplified environmental awareness — contemporary concerns may be prompting this increase, along with the building industry’s rising attention to a structure’s larger environment. In education as in the profession, landscape architecture is embracing the entire built world.

As in architecture, landscape architects in the US must hold a professional degree — a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA) or a Master of Landscape Architecture (MLA) — from an accredited institution before taking registration exams. Many of these schools are consciously reconsidering what it means to educate landscape architects today, and retooling their programs dramatically.

In addition to the professional degree programs, there are many routes to serious study, including undergraduate liberal-arts minors, pre-professional programs, post-professional programs, and adult-ed night classes. Even institutions that don’t offer landscape “programs” — such as MIT, Wentworth, Mass College of Art and Design, and Connecticut College — are offering new landscape classes as well as expanded interdisciplinary courses on related topics like environmental justice or public horticulture.

It’s a lively time to be in school.

1900
Harvard Graduate School of Design
Department of Landscape Architecture
Charles Waldheim, chair
www.gsd.harvard.edu/academic/la
Degree: MLA
Harvard, the first institution to approach landscape architecture as an academic discipline, is still examining “design at the intersection of urbanization, environment, and contemporary culture,” with a strong new focus on landscape urbanism.

1903
University of Massachusetts at Amherst
Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning
Elizabeth Brabec, department head
www.umass.edu/larp
Degrees: BSLA; MLA
UMass, with its long attention to “sustainable communities” and “protection of the land and natural resources,” now includes environmental justice, cultural accessibility and significant outreach initiatives in Holyoke and Springfield.

1942
Rhode Island School of Design
Department of Landscape Architecture
Mikyoung Kim, department head
http://landscape.risd.edu
Degree: MLA
Characterizing landscape architecture as a creative discipline bridging nature and culture, RISD emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration and design across scales, from watersheds to material details.

1968 (began at Radcliffe College) 2002 (moved to Arnold Arboretum) 2009 (new affiliation with the BAC)
The Landscape Institute at the Boston Architectural College
Heather Heimarck, director
www.the-bac.edu/landscapeinstitute
Certificates offered in landscape design, landscape preservation, landscape design history, and planting design. Through courses, workshops, and certificate programs, the Landscape Institute “stimulates creative design and stewardship,” and is soon to be expanded online.

1972
Conway School of Landscape Design
Paul Cawood Hellmund, director
www.cslsd.edu
Degree: MA in Landscape Design
Conway is a 10-month, full-time, non-professional graduate program for those interested in “ecologically and socially sustainable design of the land.”

1985
University of Rhode Island
College of the Environment and Life Sciences
Landscape Architecture Program

Will Green, director
www.uri.edu/cels/lar
Degree: BLA
URI emphasizes sustainable communities, materials, and practices, along with a growing attention toward the developing world.

1998
University of Connecticut
Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture
Mary Musgrave, head
www.plantscience.uconn.edu/la.html
Degrees: BSLA; MLA
Though recently accredited, UConn has offered landscape design and planning courses for many years, grounded in a department with a 130-year history of plant science and horticulture.

2001
Smith College
Landscape Studies
Ann Leone, director
www.smith.edu/landscapestudies
Degree: BA with LSS minor
The first of its kind at a liberal-arts college, Smith’s interdisciplinary Landscape Studies minor draws from art, engineering, the humanities, and the sciences “to investigate... how we shape our world.”

2010
Boston Architectural College
School of Landscape Architecture
Kevin Benham, head
www.the-bac.edu
Degrees: BLA; MLA (beginning fall 2010)
Though the BAC has long offered landscape courses, the new accredited professional degree programs focus on “research and education in the context of Boston and its surrounding areas” and follow its tradition of work/study education.

2011
Northeastern University
School of Architecture
George Thrush, director
www.architecture.neu.edu
Degree (anticipated): BLA
Beginning in September 2011, Northeastern’s new “urban landscape” program strategically creates curricular, research, and faculty overlaps with architecture — perhaps the first new program to be based on the principles of landscape urbanism.